**Headline:** Grow Your Own Food—and a Kinder World: How Veganic Farming Can Turn Your Garden Into a Haven for All Life

**Teaser:** More than just growing food without animal products, veganic farming reimagines agriculture as a space where humans, wildlife, and even soil microbes can coexist and flourish together, offering a bold and compassionate alternative to traditional organic methods.

By Jimmy Videle

**Author Bio:** Jimmy Videle is a farmer, naturalist, and researcher. He is the author of [*The Veganic Grower’s Handbook: Cultivating Fruits, Vegetables, and Herbs from Urban Backyard to Rural Farmyard*](https://lanternpm.org/book/the-veganic-growers-handbook/) and [*Preserving Our Sacred Lands*](https://www.amazon.com/Preserving-Our-Sacred-Lands-Whip-poor-wills/dp/B0DNG346WZ). He is also the co-founder of [NAVCS-Certified Veganic](https://certifiedveganic.org/) and a contributor to the [Observatory](https://observatory.wiki/Jimmy_Videle). His writing has appeared in CounterPunch, Countercurrents, and LA Progressive, among others.

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**[Article Body:]**

The word veganic is a combination of “vegan” and “organic.” Organic, in essence, refers to anything of natural origin, derived from living matter. Vegan, in this context, is best defined as a way of growing that minimizes impact on all life as much as possible. A person who considers themselves vegan would neither kill nor use any animals (including humans) for food or clothing, allow experiments on them, use them for entertainment purposes, or enslave, exploit, or abuse them.

Vegan organic gardening and farming (or, simply, “veganic farming”) involves the cultivation and production of food and fiber crops with minimal exploitation of all animal and plant species. In addition to adhering to [National Organic Standards](https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb), veganic growing methods exclude the use of any animal products or by-products—such as blood meal, bone meal, manure, urea, fish meal, fish emulsion, or any other animal-derived matter—because producing these materials either directly harms animals or is linked to their exploitation and suffering.

Furthermore, while organic cultivation allows for the use of organo-pesticides and organo-fungicides, veganic growing rejects them, as spraying these chemicals severely disrupts the native floral and faunal balance within farming and gardening systems.

In conventional agriculture, the use of chemical fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides is the norm in cultivating fruits, vegetables, and herbs. This manner of growing utilizes approximately [99 percent](https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/publications/110884/EIB-281.pdf?v=54268) of all farmable acreage in the United States and [98.2 percent](https://canada-organic.ca/en/what-we-do/data-research/production-data) of all farmable acreage in Canada. Organic farming—which constitutes 1 percent of the United States’ agricultural land and 1.8 percent of Canada’s—outlaws the use of all herbicides.

However, propane-powered flamethrowers are allowed among the two countries’ organic standard regimes. The organic standards also permit the use of organophosphate pesticides and fungicides. Some are so powerful, like the popular Organic Material Review Institute (OMRI) product AzaGuard, that they eliminate [more than 300 insect species](https://biosafesystems.com/product/azaguard/). How is this devastating practice “organic?”

**Veganic Growing: Let Nature Do the Work**

Veganic growing allows nature to take charge as it sees fit. By encouraging a diversity of both cultivated and native flora within gardens, edges, and hedgerows, this method invites all faunal species—including insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and small mammals—to reside there. The garden achieves maximum biodiversity. Spraying organic pesticides is never performed, as it disrupts the natural balance that nature strives to maintain. This philosophy lies at the heart of veganic growing: cultivating gardens for the benefit of all species.

Plants are allowed to mature to their full potential—flowering, seeding, and eventually decomposing in place at the end of their life cycle—providing habitat for a variety of wildlife. The soil surface is never left bare. When a harvestable crop is exhausted, a cover crop (green manure) such as buckwheat, clover, or oats is planted to occupy the space. These plants provide additional flowers and seeds for pollinators and other wildlife that seek nectar, seeds, and shelter beneath the canopy.

Small-scale organic farms often try to maximize their space (and profits) by replanting the same beds up to four times per season. After each rotation, they rototill or plow the gardens, disturbing microfauna with every successive sowing. In contrast, small-scale veganic growers adopt a low-till, minimal machinery approach to soil preparation. Tractors and similar equipment can severely damage soil structure by compacting clays and squeezing moisture from loose, sandy loams.

**The Manure and Meal Dilemma**

All manures come from enslaved animals—creatures who are not free to live as they choose and are eventually killed when their usefulness expires. [Female chickens are kept in battery cages](https://observatory.wiki/Guide_to_Factory-Farmed_Chickens%3A_Animal_Cruelty_on_a_Massive_Scale), a type of extreme confinement that amounts to severe animal cruelty. Their manure is pelletized, and they are culled once their egg production drastically declines, typically in their third year on small-scale operations or after just one year in industrialized ones. Cows and sheep provide the vast majority of manure available on the market; this manure comes from animals that are either stanchioned (milked cows and sheep) or feedlot-finished (raised for meat).

Blood and bone meals come from animals eliminated at slaughterhouses. Blood, collected during the slaughter of pigs and cows, is dried for use as fertilizer and is also fed back to the same species as blood meal. Whole skeletons are transported to rendering plants, where [bones are crushed and dried into bone meal](https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/publications/animal-carcass-disposal-options-rendering-incineration-burial-composting)—another common fertilizer and animal feed. Small-scale animal operations in rural areas, often too distant from rendering facilities, produce compost from the animals themselves who die prematurely. This compost is then mixed with dry straw and their manure to sell as finished compost.

Whole fish—such as anchovies, herring, menhaden, capelin, pilchard, sardines, and mackerel—are harvested from the open ocean (pelagic) and [processed into fish meal](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/feeds-aquaculture#:~:text=About%2070%20percent%20of%20the,are%20processed%20for%20human%20consumption.) (which makes up approximately 70 percent of fish meal production). The remaining 30 percent comes from fish remains generated by human processing. This fish meal is sold as fertilizer and feed for farm-raised fish. Shellfish meals are made from the shells of trawled shrimp, trapped crab, and lobsters. Any soil product labeled as a “natural fertilizer” almost always contains manure or animal meals.

The University of Washington [states](https://extension.wsu.edu/animalag/manure-on-your-farm-asset-or-liability/) that to supply 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre—which is barely enough for fertilizing sweet corn—it recommends applying three tons of poultry manure or 200 tons of dairy manure per acre in the garden. That amounts to 6,000 pounds (2,720 kilograms) of poultry manure versus 400,000 pounds (181,400 kilograms) of dairy manure or separated dairy solids.

Growers are encouraged to carefully consider whether using such products aligns with their morals and standards. Like many conventional growers, I once believed it was impossible to grow without chemical fertilizers. Later, I embraced organic farming, assuming that farmyard manure and animal integration were indispensable. However, I eventually discovered a better approach: using plant-based composts, amendments, and [teas](https://www.almanac.com/fertilizer-tea-plants-weeds-and-grass)—a markedly less exploitative method.

**Small-Scale, Big Impact: Growing Food and Restoring the Earth with Veganics**

Small-scale farms—especially those that are an acre or less in size—are key to the future restoration of our collective planet. There is no better way to ensure local food security and independence than for each of us to grow some, if not all, of our food. With time, patience, experience, and my handbook as a reference guide, we can begin to heal the anthropogenic damage that agriculture has caused over the past century. I became an organic farmer because it was the least exploitative occupation I could imagine in an ever-modernizing world. I am, and will remain, a veganic grower because it is infinitely more compassionate.

I began my gardening journey in 1998 as a small-scale conventional grower, transitioned to professional organic market gardening in 2005, and embraced veganic growing in 2015. Over the years, I have cultivated more than 400 different plant varieties across North America. Here at [La Ferme de l’Aube](https://certifiedveganic.org/our-farms-and-farmers/north-america/canada/la-ferme-de-laube/), we have consulted thousands of people on veganic growing techniques through our artisanal seed company and by selling vegetable seedlings. We supply produce to forty families throughout the growing season, further demonstrating that this method is feasible for both community gardeners and small-scale market growers.

Urban backyard gardens have a smaller environmental footprint than a single acre of rural farmland. In cities and suburbs, human activity has already significantly altered grasslands, edges, and forests that once thrived there. Creating diverse urban garden systems is therefore a vast improvement for local inhabitants. Many front and backyards are covered with grass, gravel, or wood chip mulch over native soil, presenting vibrant opportunities to build highly fertile garden spaces.

A 2016 University of California at Santa Barbara [study](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169204616301323) found that “turning lawns into vegetable gardens reduces greenhouse gas emissions. For every one kilo (2.2 pounds) of vegetables produced, two kilos (4.4 pounds) of emissions can be cut.” Interestingly, the more productive the gardens, the lower the carbon emissions are, as the grower buys fewer fruits, vegetables, and herbs from elsewhere.

Additionally, by composting all vegetable waste and recuperating [greywater](https://www.greywatercorps.com/greywater) into the gardening system, we can further slash emissions. The authors conclude, “Our hope is that this research helps motivate households, communities, and policymakers to support vegetable gardens that can contribute to mitigating climate change.”

**Growing With Nature: Choosing the Right Land Without Harming Wild Ecosystems**

The farmyard is more complex because the community of beings that dwell there is already quite extensive, so careful consideration is necessary before breaking ground. When assessing the countryside, three types of land show the greatest potential for cultivation: grasslands (either native or cultivated), forest clearings, and forest edges where open land meets the forest. Other areas, such as forests, wetlands, and lands bordering watercourses, are best left undisturbed, as they serve vital ecological functions.

There is already enough cultivated or human-degraded land—damaged either by people or the animals they raise—that it is unnecessary to convert any more healthy, native terrain, whether grassland, clearing, edge, or forest. Globally, we produce 1.5 times more fruits, vegetables, and herbs than can be consumed each year. The problem is not a lack of space or growing capacity, but rather a shortage of plant-based diversity and equitable distribution to those who need it most.

Consider a healthy forest: Is it reasonable to apply up to 200 tons per acre of manure to such a pristine natural setting? No—it is absurd. It is equally unreasonable to apply that volume of manure to a one-acre vegetable patch. A far better practice is to add three tons per acre of composted plant materials to gardens, a method that is more natural and better assimilated by the plant community.

Grassland systems function similarly. Most fertility comes from the decay and death of above-ground grasses and plants, supplemented by small amounts of bird and mammal excrement, but never approaching three tons per acre. The recommendation to apply excessive manure arises primarily from overproduction and a lack of proper disposal options. When building soils for gardens, the only animal inputs necessary are those naturally present through microorganisms in living soil.

**Plan, Plant, Prosper: Mapping Your Garden for a Productive and Compassionate Harvest**

The best way to start is by making a list of the fruits, vegetables, and herbs you enjoy eating and would like to grow. Do you want cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and summer squash every week during their season? Lettuce and/or mesclun salad mix weekly? What about beets, carrots, and peas? Or fresh herbs? The possibilities are endless—there is no limit to your culinary imagination and planting options.

Any growing space over 7,500 square feet (roughly 1/6 acre or 0.068 hectares) can be divided to meet multiple needs: approximately 6,000 square feet for nourishing two people and 1,500 square feet (roughly 20 percent of the total area) reserved for the benefit of all other inhabitants. This arrangement can even allow a portion of the land to be used for sale or barter. In addition to feeding ourselves well and supplying produce to 40 families weekly for 15 weeks, we exchange garden goods for organic apples, blueberries, pears, raspberries, kimchi (fermented cabbage), veganic compost, building materials, acupuncture treatments, and more. The potential is limitless, entirely depending on your interest in building community.

Learning to use a computer spreadsheet or similar software will significantly aid in calendar planning and help keep everything organized. Alternatively, traditional graph paper and a three-ring binder work just as well. Some planting dates are self-explanatory—for example, if the “soil open” date is the first week of May, then carrots, kale, peas, rapini, and salad greens can be seeded at that time. In other cases, it’s necessary to work backward from the desired transplant date. Although everyone wants to eat tomatoes as early as possible, the outdoor transplant date is never earlier than the week of the average last frost. Sounds complicated? A little tricky at first, perhaps—but it becomes easier after planning for a few varieties. With patience, the whole calendar will take shape.

How much to grow? Based on the approximate yield of each species, it is entirely up to you. The key determining variables are how much you eat and the available space. But we do not want to plant them all at the same time, as they will all be ready within a two to three-week window. We would need to plant in succession. Once the dates, plants desired, and successions (if applicable) have been entered into our desired calendar model, the map of the gardens can be developed. After we have compiled all our wants and needs for the growing season, that information gets plotted on the map. Like all of us, it is assured that you will also run out of space before you plot all your garden aspirations.

To rotate or not to rotate—that is the gardener’s dilemma. Some species we grow as annuals—such as eggplant, ground cherries, peppers, tomatillos, and tomatoes—are actually perennials in frost-free regions, feeding from the same patch year after year. The primary reasons for rotating crops are to prevent disease and reduce pressure from nematodes (microscopic roundworms). Bacterial blights, wilts, and fungal molds exist in all soils and tend to worsen with climatic extremes during the growing season.

When temperatures shift abruptly—often due to unseasonably cold and wet weather—these pathogens become active. Nematodes, cutworms, and wireworms are common in most soils and are most active when the soil warms and seedlings are young. While these pests and diseases exist to some degree everywhere, certain bacterial diseases specifically target tomatoes. Fungi favor cucurbits (such as cucumbers, melons, and squash). Worms prefer carrots, garlic, and onions. Changing the location of plant families each season is a sensible and preventative approach.

Alongside your calendar, plan, and maps, it’s wise to keep a daily activity or observation log. Recording notes on growth rates, insect and disease pressures, and temperature fluctuations will provide valuable data for analysis and informed decision-making. Tracking which varieties thrive or fail will make planning for the following season less time-consuming—and ultimately more enjoyable.

The primary purpose of organic farming—and all forms of agriculture, growing, and gardening—is to produce food for human beings. Veganic growing, however, allows space for all beings to thrive, from microscopic nematodes to the leggy moose and every species in between. Happy and kind growing wherever you may reside.