

## Ten Ways to Tackle Weeds and Pests without Chemicals

**1 HEALTHY SOIL** The soil acts as the immune system of your plants. If plants are getting what they need from nutrient-dense, well-aerated soil, they will be much more resistant to disease, and fewer pests will prey on them. A generous layer of compost added annually has the added benefit of helping to reduce weeds.

**2 BENEFICIAL INSECTS** Use companion planting, crop diversity, and interplanted flowers to attract beneficial insects to your garden that will deter or attack harmful insects. Basil planted among tomato plants, for instance, will draw insects that prey on tomato hornworms.

**3 PROTECTIVE LAYER** Deter weed growth with a protective layer of alfalfa hay or straw around your plants; the layer can starve potential weeds of sun and prevent their growth. An added benefit is that this layer helps retain moisture and adds nutrients to the soil as it decays.

**4 WEED BY HAND** Far and away the most effective method for keeping out weeds is to pull them up at the root by hand or hoe. (If snapped off above the root they will grow back quickly.) The key is consistency— pull the weeds out when they're still young and never let them get established. If

you stay on top of it, weeding won't take more than 30 minutes a week in most gardens. Never let the weeds go to seed, or produce seed.

**5 HANDPICK BUGS** If you have Japanese beetles, squash bugs, or cabbage worms, arm your kids or your neighbors' kids with cups of soapy water and tell them to pick off the bugs and drop them in their cups. This may be the least appealing task in an organic food garden, but kids love it.

**6 GARLIC BARRIER** A natural insect repellent, Garlic Barrier ([garlicbarrier.com](http://garlicbarrier.com)) is a preventive measure, so apply it before bugs arrive to deter them. You can also make your own garlic spray at home with a simple recipe that's easily found online. I routinely mix it with Neptune's Harvest ([neptunesharvest.com](http://neptunesharvest.com)) fertilizer spray and apply it every other week to plant leaves, so that the vegetables and fruits get nourished with a protective scent of garlic that most bugs don't like.

**7 BT** The certified organic insecticide Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt for short) is derived from a bacteria that is common in soil and benign to humans. It's especially effective at killing caterpillars as well as beetles, flies, and mosquito larvae.

**8 SAFER SOAP** The best way to handle aphids is to first remove them from plant leaves with a hard spray of water from the garden hose and then spray them with a layer of Safer Brand Insect-Killing Soap ([saferbrand.com](http://saferbrand.com)) to finish them off. Safer Soap can also tackle mealybugs and whiteflies.

**9 SAFERGRO MILDEW CURE** This organic spray ([safergro.com](http://safergro.com)) helps prevent "powdery mildew," a common disease that afflicts pumpkins, squash, and melons in particular.

**10 SLUGGO** A barrier of Sluggo scattered around a plant or bordering the entire garden is the best way to deter snails and slugs. The granulated pellets made with iron phosphate are pet- and wildlife- friendly. [www.montereylawngarden.com/products/organic/#Molluscicides](http://www.montereylawngarden.com/products/organic/#Molluscicides)

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*Bonus: For a special video about the Green City Market's Edible Garden visit: [ediblechicago.com/videos](http://ediblechicago.com/videos)*