

A top-down view of various gardening tools including a trowel, a fork, and a shovel, along with several small seedlings in plastic pots, all resting on a dark, rich layer of soil.

gardening without chemicals



Think twice before using pesticides and herbicides.

Healthy landscapes protect people, pets, and Puget Sound – it's a win for everyone. You get beautiful, safe gardens and delicious chemical – free food. Pesticides and herbicides (bug and weed killers) can harm the health of our soils, plants, wildlife, and families. The good news is that we don't need those chemicals to grow a healthy, beautiful landscape.

Follow these steps to go chemical-free:

- 1 Start with Prevention.
- 2 Identify pests before you spray, stomp, or squash.
- 3 Accept a little damage and give nature time to work.
- 4 When needed, use safer alternative products.
- 5 Handle chemical pesticides and herbicides properly.



1 Start with Prevention.

A



Build healthy soil with compost and mulch – organisms in healthy soil protect plants from many diseases and pests.

B



Choose pest-resistant plants and put them in the sun and soil conditions they prefer.

C



Remove diseased plants to reduce hiding places for insect pests.

D



Use a variety of plants, so if pests attack one plant, others can fill its place.

E



Pull weeds before they go to seed and spread.

2 Identify pests before you spray, stomp, or squash.

What you think is a pest may be a beneficial, or helpful, insect that eats pests. Whether it's a bug, disease, or weed, you should identify it to know how best to manage it.

Visit gardenhotline.org or call 206-633-0224 for help identifying pests and weeds.



3 Accept a little damage and give nature time to work.

Most insects are beneficial: only about 1-5% of the insects in our gardens are pests. Beneficial insects, like ground beetles, ladybugs, and lacewings help control pests. Don't spray at the first sign of damage – nature may control it for you. Also, plants often outgrow the damage.



4 When needed, use safer alternative products.

Chemical pesticides and herbicides (bug and weed killers) can cause serious harm to people, pets, wildlife, and water quality. Even natural and organic pesticides can harm beneficial insects like pollinators, so use them only if necessary.

Here are a few safer options for controlling weeds and pests:



Long-handled weed pullers remove deep taproots easily, and hoe-style weeder are effective with shallow-rooted weeds.



Mulching around trees and shrubs with 2-3 inches of wood chips once a year reduces weeds in beds.



Hand-picking can be effective for large pests like cabbage loopers, tomato hornworms, and slugs. Colorful sticky traps can be used for flying pests like apple maggot and whitefly. Beer traps can be used to control slugs.



Less toxic, certified organic products like insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, and plant-based insecticides are available. Visit growsmartgrowsafe.org for a list of safer products.

5 Handle chemical pesticides and herbicides properly.

Hazardous chemicals should be stored properly, and only used if necessary. For safe disposal, bring them to a Hazardous Waste collection site.

Visit kingcountyhazwasteWA.gov or call the Haz Waste Help Line 206-296-4692 to find a collection site near you.



A Keep hazardous products away from children and pets.



B Never mix products. Some mixtures produce a poisonous gas.



C Keep hazardous products away from drains.



D Keep hazardous products away from food items, including vegetable gardens.



E Keep hazardous products in original containers and make sure they have a label.

Choose less hazardous products	Safest  Products with "For Organic Use" and "Certified Organic". 	Safe enough  Products that do NOT have the words CAUTION, WARNING, DANGER or POISON. 	Somewhat harmful  Products with the words CAUTION or WARNING. 	Most harmful  Avoid products with the words DANGER and POISON. 
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Questions?

Ask the Garden Hotline a free service from Seattle Public Utilities, The Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, and Cascade Water Alliance.

gardenhotline.org or 206-633-0224

Learn more:

seattle.gov/util/services/yard

kingcounty.gov/natural-yard

naturalyardcare.org

kingcountyhazwasteWA.gov

growsmartgrowsafe.org



**Seattle
Public
Utilities**



**Hazardous Waste
Management Program**

Alternative Formats Available
Call 206-633-0224 or TTY: 711

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