

# **SOUTH CAROLINA**



# **SMART GARDENER HANDBOOK**

**Down-to-Earth Tips, Guidance and Information  
on How to 'Go Green' in Your Backyard**

# Introduction

The S.C. Smart Gardener Handbook is designed to help you learn the basics of going green in your backyard.

The handbook, which is the centerpiece of the S.C. Smart Gardener Program, covers a variety of topics including healthy soil, composting, natural lawn care and smart watering as well as limiting or eliminating your use of pesticides. Any of these recommendations, if turned into practices by you at home, will help conserve resources, protect South Carolina's environment and maybe even save you money.

Composting at home is the perfect example. Consider the many green benefits. Compost is a valuable product that:

- reduces the amount of waste a household generates;
- improves soil quality;
- increases the ability of soil to hold water;
- insulates plants against extreme temperatures;
- helps plants absorb nutrients; and
- suppresses plant diseases and pests.

These benefits reduce your need to water as often and reduce the need to buy and use fertilizers and pesticides. That lessens potential runoff pollution to nearby streams, rivers and lakes and saves you money.

In short, even the smallest individual actions can have lasting environmental benefits. This handbook provides the information, tips and guidance for you to take those actions to go green at home.

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling (Office) produces this handbook in partnership with Clemson Extension, the S.C. Conservation Districts Employee Association and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

This handbook is adapted from "The Natural Lawn and Garden: Healthy Landscapes for a Healthy Environment" series developed by the City of Seattle's Saving Water Partnership. For more information, visit [www.cityofseattle.net/util/rescons](http://www.cityofseattle.net/util/rescons). All text and material are used with permission. Photographs are provided by Ian Edelstein and Richard Hartlag unless otherwise noted. All illustrations are by Wilda Boyd.

In addition to this handbook, the S.C. Smart Gardener Program also includes workshops and technical assistance as well as other printed materials. For more information on the S.C. Smart Gardener Program, visit [www.scdhec.gov/compost](http://www.scdhec.gov/compost) or call the Office at 1-800-768-7348.

## Thank You ...

Special thanks to the steering committee that helped develop this handbook.

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# Foreword

By Robert Polomski

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Gardening is the most popular hobby in America and rightfully so. It offers the benefits of beauty, nourishment and exercise. Also, gardening establishes connections with friends and neighbors in the community and serves as a bridge between generations of young and not-so-young gardeners. I still have fond childhood memories of my grandfather sharing stories with me while we worked side-by-side in the garden.

Whether you have a garden or a landscape at home or in the community, strive to become a knowledgeable and responsible gardener. Watering, fertilizing and controlling pests affect the health and appearance of the plants in your garden and landscape. These activities, however, also have an impact on the environment. Therefore, gardeners have the responsibility of safeguarding our land and water resources.

“The S.C. Smart Gardener Handbook” contains information and techniques that will improve your gardening skills and help you protect and preserve our environment. A few of the practices that are discussed in the handbook include:

- building healthy, fertile soil with organic matter and selecting and using appropriate fertilizers. Soil is the foundation of the garden and landscape. Improving its fertility and selecting the right fertilizers will keep the plants healthy and protect water quality;
- reducing waste by recycling yard trimmings and food scraps back into the garden and landscape.

This sustainable practice “feeds” your plants and improves the soil;

- conserving water by watering efficiently at the right time and with the right amount;
- managing pests – weeds, insects, and diseases – by learning how to avoid them and how to deal with pests when they appear. This section will introduce you to non-chemical approaches, such as managing insects by handpicking, trapping or using barriers, before resorting to less toxic pesticides. When pesticides are absolutely necessary, applying them properly will avoid harming beneficial insects and animals as well as contaminating soil, surface water and groundwater; and
- selecting the right plants for the right location in South Carolina landscapes. Growing adapted, pest-resistant plants will make gardening less about controlling pests and more about growing and enjoying plants.

At the end of most chapters you will find a list of books, organizations, Web sites and other helpful resources.

“The S.C. Smart Gardener Handbook” will inform and inspire you. It will fuel your desire to grow vegetables, flowers, shrubs and trees. The handbook may even encourage you to teach your friends and neighbors about composting, fertilizing, watering wisely and managing pests responsibly. Enjoy your adventure as you learn how to protect our natural resources as you create and maintain nourishing gardens and beautiful landscapes.

## Contact Information ...

Readers are encouraged to contact their local Clemson Extension office for more information throughout this handbook. A list of county offices and telephone numbers is available at [www.clemson.edu/extension](http://www.clemson.edu/extension), then click on COUNTY OFFICES on the left menu. Readers may call Clemson Extension’s Home and Garden Information Center at 1-888-656-9988.

For more information about the S.C. Smart Gardener Program and other recycling programs, call DHEC’s Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling at 1-800-768-7348 or visit [www.scdhec.gov/compost](http://www.scdhec.gov/compost).