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Gardeners Corner

Ask Ruth: Solarizing Soil

Dear Ruth,

Greetings from SW North Dakota. I had some problem with blight the

Farmer's Corner

Ask Tom: Metals in Granulated Poultry Litter



Dear Tom –

We use a granulated poultry litter product that is OMRI (Organic Materials Review Institute) listed for organic production. I read that those products may have high levels of metals that can accumulate over time and damage our soil. Should we be concerned? Thanks.

-- Karla in Metaphor, NC

Dear Carla –

A specific answer to your question depends on your soil type, pH, cropping system, soil supplements, and pest management strategies. To provide a general answer I will use some information on copper in tomato production. Copper is used in poultry feed so it ends up in poultry litter-based soil supplements. It is also present in several materials such as copper sulfate used to manage late blight and other tomato diseases.

Copper is an important micronutrient that tomatoes need to thrive, but high levels can damage plants. High copper levels can also raise the crop copper content to a point where it is toxic to humans and livestock that eat the crop. Copper is more stable in the soil than some nutrients but copper levels vary as it is applied in the form of soil supplements and sprays and as it leaves when rainfall and irrigation leach it from the soil. Copper is also carried off in crops and perhaps plant debris. Soil type and pH influence this dynamic system. Acid conditions help metals dissolve and move through the soil and groundwater. Organic soils tend to hold metals more effectively than sandy soils.



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past few years. I was told to place clear plastic in the latter part of the summer in the area where you plan to grow tomatoes the following year. I staked down the plastic and checked the soil temperature under the plastic on a regular

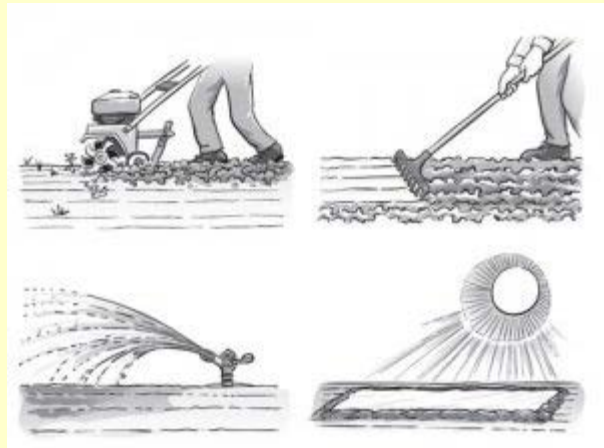
basis. The logic of this... (if there is any) was to heat the soil to a temp of 100 degrees+ for at least 30 days and this is supposed to kill the blight spore that causes the blight problem. This is the first year that I have tried this so I cannot give you any synopsis of results. I will know more about the success of this process after next year's growing season. I am looking for a good method to control this devastating disease.

- U. S. Gratz

Dear U.S.,

First...I am super impressed that you are writing from North Dakota. Thanks for reading our column!

As far as controlling late blight – last summer WNC experienced record rainfalls and the area was devastated by late blight. Check out our recent article on late blight, and these great photos of late blight. One additional note (since some of us in WNC will be planting potatoes in March)...be sure to remove any and all volunteer potatoes that come up in your garden – as a preventative measure against late blight.



[Read more at Our Blog](#)

Gardeners: Got a question for Ruth? Email it to us at

enews@organicgrowersschool.org

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**Farmers: Got a question for Tom?
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Forward
To A Friend

New Year Means Big Changes for OGS!

OGS Welcomes New Executive Director

The Organic Growers School announces the appointment of Lee Warren as its new Executive Director as of the start of 2014. Organic Growers School works to advance organic agriculture and sustainable living in the Southern Appalachian region by gathering people to teach, learn, and celebrate together.

"I am delighted to be joining Organic Growers School as the next Executive Director," Warren said. "The organization's vision of a mutually supportive network of thriving communities and prosperous farmers throughout our region is a vision close to my heart. The dedication and passion on the part of the board, staff, and participants is an inspiring climate to step into. While there are certainly challenges for non-profits in today's economic climate, I believe we will be able to reach our goals of expanding programming to more organic growers, from container gardeners to farmers, because Organic Growers School fills a much-needed educational niche and enjoys tremendous support in the local community. I feel privileged to have the chance to work on such a timely and important endeavor."



[Read more at Our Blog](#)

Last CRAFT Tour of 2013

Thanks to Goldfinch Gardens!

For our October and last CRAFT tour of the 2013 season we visited Goldfinch Gardens, where Ben McCann and Cedar Johnson shared their efforts at season extension and greenhouse management. The cooler weather set the stage for lots of discussion about the pros, cons and how-tos for extending your season and markets into less favorable growing conditions. Thanks again to Cedar and Ben for their time and willingness to share all the ins and outs of their farm business.

Ben and Cedar grow the range of A-Z vegetables on about 1.5 acres of land in Celo, NC. Their main markets are an online farmers market and local restaurants, and having quality products as long as possible is important to meet their demand. They've invested, brainstormed, tried a few things and brainstormed some more to devise the best methods for extending their season in the Celo valley. The major challenge they face with season extension is wind. Countless times they've come out to find row cover billowing in the trees, or pipe caterpillars up turned and broken.



[Read more at Our Blog](#)

Questions? Thoughts? Comments?

We want to hear from you!

Email them to us at

jenn@organicgrowersschool.org

See You in March!

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