



## Organic Grow: Do I Really Want to Use This?

by Rick Weller, Founder of Organically Done Plant Products

Those of us who grow organically have chosen to do so for a variety of reasons but, at a minimum, we expect the products we add to our grow to be environmentally safe and free from toxins.

Take a look at the label when you are considering an 'organic' product. If an ingredient sounds like a chemical, it probably is. If an ingredient sounds like a natural or organic component, dig a little deeper.

Here are a few of the components (or component categories) that you may find.

**Urea** – produced from livestock urine or synthesized from natural gas, urea is a staple of the chemical agricultural community due to its high concentration of nitrogen. While 'organic' (non-synthesized), it is prohibited for use in organic agriculture by OMRI. Urea does not support soil microbial processes, it is water soluble and immediately available to plants which can lead to plant burn and leaching into fresh water supplies.



**Livestock Bi-Products** – a variety of remnants from the livestock slaughtering process are sold as plant products including blood meal, bone meal, etc. Industrial livestock producers in the U.S. use grain-based feed for their animals, inoculated with antibiotics and other veterinary drugs. Grains are primarily comprised of soy and corn. Agricultural corn and soy in the U.S. is almost exclusively genetically modified and heavily sprayed with pesticides. Studies have found levels of antibiotics and new proteins (GMO) in the tissue of animals fed with these products. Are these contaminants what you really want to add to your plant environment?

**Manures** – same issues as livestock bi-products.

**Bat Guano** – guano is the feces and urine produced by bats. Birds can carry or transmit disease dangerous to humans (think rabies). Fungal disease (like Histoplasmosis) can be found in bird feces that has serious human health effects. Is the risk high? I do not know the answer to this although I do know that firms who specialize in facility remediation (cleaning up bat infestation) are very expensive and work in spacesuits. Another issue is the method used for guano harvesting. This is a significant cause of habitat disruption and destruction – some firms bring their bulldozers into the bat caves. I have heard of producers who are harvesting sustainably but identifying them is difficult.



**Vegetative Components** – not all vegetative components are made equal. As we know, many crops in the U.S. are primarily grown from GM seeds with heavy applications of pesticides throughout their grow cycle. Some of these crops that you may find in organic fertilizers include cottonseed, soy and cocoa. While it may be possible to purchase organically grown versions of these products, OMRI does not require organically grown components to be used in an organic fertilizer.

**Chilean (sodium) Nitrate** – a mined product from Chili that is being removed from OMRI's list of approved materials for organic agriculture due to the environmental impact of harvesting and its high solubility.

**Muriate of Potash** – not allowed by OMRI for organic agriculture due to its high solubility and its release of free chloride in soil.

**Biosolids and Sewer Sludge** – one of the original 'organic' fertilizers on the mass market was derived from the sewage waste of Milwaukee (and still sold today). This waste contains human feces and urine, industrial waste, disposed pharmaceuticals,



etc. - everything that goes into our waste system. OMRI prohibits the use of sewer sludge in organic agriculture. Risks include heavy metals, PCB's, pharmaceuticals and pathogens.

These are just a few of the ingredients you may find in fertilizers labeled as natural or organic. Everything has its trade-offs and there is no perfect choice – but you can make an informed one.



**Organically Done** ([www.organicallydone.com](http://www.organicallydone.com)) is a Michigan manufacturer of organic fertilizers and soil amendments. Our mission is to produce high-quality truly organic products that provide what your plants need while being free of potential contaminating sources that are found in many of today's "organic" alternatives – NOT ALL ORGANICS ARE CREATED EQUAL.