

Principles to Follow in Natural Farming

Natural Farming has no strict rules, only principles to guide you as you learn to become a better natural farmer. Natural Farming is not only about replacing chemical inputs with organic inputs but also about creating a farming system that is in tune with the way Nature operates.

1 Crop cover

Aim towards green cover for as long a time as possible

Nature aims at maximum ground cover with green plants, including trees, which means there's little if any damage to the soil from raindrops, and water infiltrates more easily along plant roots. Not only does 'healthy soil make healthy plants', but 'healthy plants create healthy soil'. So, the more plants covering the soil throughout the year, the healthier the soil.



2 Crop diversity

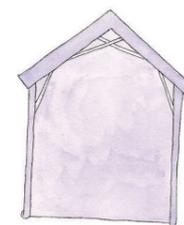
Include at least 8 – 12 species in any one cropping area

If you can get 8 to 12 different plants, including trees, growing near each other then this multiplies the interactions and benefits between the plants. Each plant pumps a unique set of substances into the soil, attracting different varieties of beneficial microbes.

3 No/low till farming

Keep tillage disturbance to a minimum, ideally not at all

Ploughing disturbs the structure of the soil, ripping through living fungal threads woven extensively through all healthy soil. These fungi in the soil make glue to hold the soil together in what are called 'stable soil aggregates'. Zero or minimum tillage contributes to soil with those all-important stable aggregates. This is soil that is rich, loose and crumbly.



4 Integrate animals

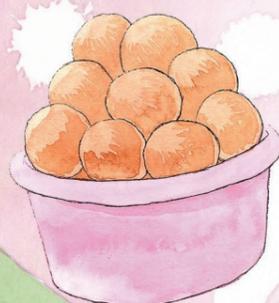
Have livestock as an integral part of the farming system

Natural Farming produces lots of biomass that can feed animals who produce manure. Fresh manure is super-charged with a large diversity of microbes, a good source for making bio-stimulants. In grasslands with long dry seasons, the microbes in ruminants' stomachs play a critical role in breaking down the dry grass.

5 Use of bio-stimulants

Select and use appropriate bio-stimulants to speed up life returning to soils

Bio-stimulants are tonics for the soil and plants to help quickly bring life back to the soil and plants by inoculating them and the soil with microbes. The microbes then ensure plants get nutrients in return for receiving sugars from the plant roots. Once the soil is healthy enough, bio-stimulants shouldn't be needed.



6 Organic matter addition

Increase OM through the addition of dry mulches

Nature always covers and protects the soil, so we must do the same. Thick mulch covering the soil around plants, using any available dry matter, is another critical practice in Natural Farming. Mulch helps create a comfortable and moist home for microbes. Mulch also keeps the soil cool in hot weather.

7 Local seeds

Use only local/traditional seeds

Natural Farming has an emphasis on using local and traditional or heirloom seeds. Farmers have evolved seeds for their own situation for thousands of years to suit particular soil and climates. Modern hybrid and GMO seed varieties are not adapted to local conditions and must often be used with toxic chemicals.



8 Pest management

Understand pest life cycles and use non-poisonous methods to address the weakest link in pest life cycles

Pest management is complex when shifting to Natural Farming. The key is understanding the life cycle of pests and focusing on the weakest link in this cycle. There are many different natural approaches to choose from.

9 No chemical stress

Avoid all chemical pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers

Natural Farming means stopping all chemicals. If you're currently farming with chemicals, start with a small section of your farm to learn how to do this. Then expand your Natural Farming area with confidence.

