

SPRING GARDEN BED PREPARATION

The first step in getting your garden started in spring is preparing the soil. Before planting seeds and plants the soil should be loosened and prepared to create an ideal growing environment. You can begin preparing as soon as the soil is thawed and not muddy.



OPTIONS FOR NEW GARDENS AND FOR BREAKING GROUND

Once you have completed one of the following methods of starting a new garden refer to the section on 'Preparing the Planting Bed' below.

REMOVE THE GRASS AND TURN THE SOIL BY HAND. When you remove the grass, try to just remove the top layer of grass (2-3 inches), leaving the soil in place.

USE BLACK PLASTIC TO KILL GRASS AND WEEDS. Cut plastic to the area of the bed and weigh down with rocks or bricks along the edges. Leave the plastic on for 4-6 weeks until grass and weeds are brown and dead looking. Rake off dead plant material and turn over and loosen soil with a shovel and rake. Be sure to get out all the grass or it may resprout!

BUILD RAISED BEDS. Raised beds are beds framed out in wood and filled with soil from an outside source. Some sites are best suited for raised beds, particularly if soil is poor and/or really rocky. *For more information see our resource guide on building raised beds.*

TILL YOUR GARDEN. Tilling is a method of turning your soil with a machine (tiller). You can choose to till the grass directly or can remove grass first for better results. Either way, after tilling, you will need to rake out all the clumps and grass and prepare for planting. Additionally, some lots will require some work with a shovel before a tiller can even do the job!

OPTIONS FOR PREPARING EXISTING GARDENS

IF YOUR GARDEN WAS "PUT TO BED" LAST FALL (putting garden to bed means pulling plants & covering bed with shredded organic material such as leaves). Rake back leaves and aerate the soil with a garden fork, broad fork or shovel.

IF A NEW GARDEN WAS STARTED WITH "LASAGNA" BEDS LAST FALL (see resource guide for info on lasagna beds). Using your hands, pull back top layer of material if it is not yet decomposed. Aerate the soil with a shovel or fork. Directly plant your transplants* in the beds (*we don't recommend direct seeding into lasagna beds).

IF LAST YEARS GARDEN WAS NOT REMOVED BEFORE THE WINTER Turn the garden by hand. You'll need to pull out last year's plant material and any new spring weeds before planting, all the weeds, and remaining debris. If you need tools and are an active participant you may use the tools at your cluster tool bank. You may also choose to till your garden, but we do not recommend tilling every year.

PREPARING THE PLANTING BED

After initial bed preparation (removing sod, tilling, raking off leaves, etc), you'll need to break up any clumps of soil and create a smooth planting area using a hard rake. As you do this, make sure to remove any remaining weeds or grass clumps (otherwise they will just begin growing again!). Using the tines of a hard rake, push and pull the loosened soil across the bed breaking up chunks and smoothing out the bed. This process ensures all plants and seeds planted in the bed get adequate water and sun, especially when they are young and tender. Tilth is the consistency of the soil once you have prepared it. A course tilth is larger chunks of soil. A fine tilth has smaller pieces of soil, ideally 1/8 to 1/4 inch in size. Fine tilth soil can pour through your fingers if your hand is loosely held open. Seeds grow best (and most consistently) in fine tilth soil. Transplants grow well in both fine and course tilth soil.

A NOTE ON TILLING:

In our opinion, tilling the same site year after year can have a negative effect on soil health. Each time you till the soil, you lose the layers of beneficial fungus and microorganisms that are good for the plants. We **highly** recommend you explore other ways of preparing your soil, particularly after grass and weeds have been initially removed. The simplest of these methods includes putting your garden to bed for the winter, which allows for simple bed prep in the spring.

ADD SOME COMPOST!

However you prepare your beds it's always a good idea to add compost before you plant. Adding compost can make ordinary soil rich and fertile. We recommend approximately a five gallon bucket per 4x8 foot area.

NEED ASSISTANCE WITH GARDEN PREP?

Participants in the Garden Resource Program may be eligible for support with garden preparation. For more information about technical assistance and resources available to participants, please call 313-757-2635



This Resource Guide is prepared by Keep Growing Detroit for participants in the Garden Resource Program. For more info please contact 313-757-2635, keepgrowingdetroit@gmail.com or visit our website at WWW.DETROITAGRICULTURE.NET