

The Complete Guide to No-Dig Gardening

by *Charlie Nardozzi at GardeningwithCharlie.com*

No-Dig Gardening is an ancient technique that's back in vogue again. Farmers are more and more using No-Till as a method to preserve the soil health and life, while reducing work and inputs. Gardeners can do the same thing with No-Dig where you'll work less, enhance more abundant soil life which leads to healthier plants.



Benefits of No-Dig

The Soil Wins- More and diverse microbes in the soil
It Helps the Planet- Sequesters carbon from the atmosphere
There's Less Set Up Work for You
And It's Less Maintenance- The system maintains itself with few inputs
You'll Have Healthier Plants- Less disease, more yields

Types of No-Dig

All Soil/Compost- Simply fill the beds with a 50:50 mix of soil and compost and you're ready to plant.

Multi-Layer Bed- Using locally sourced organic materials if possible, add layers of green and brown materials to build a 3 foot tall bed. Cap it with compost.

Deep Mulching- Made popular by Ruth Stout, mulch your whole garden with a 8- to 10- inch thick layer of hay, straw and chopped leaves. Keep covered year round and plant by moving the mulch aside.

Free Standing vs Permanent Raised Beds

Use free standing beds when you want to:

- Change the bed each year
- Ease of moving materials in and out
- Not sure the beds will remain long term

Use permanent beds when you want to:

- Prevent people and animals from getting in the beds
- Need lowest maintenance beds
- Will be gardening there for a long time

Building the No-Dig Bed

Lasagna Gardening- After mowing down the area, add an 8-inch thick layer of

organic materials, such as hay or straw, then cap it with a 4-to 6-inch thick layer of compost.

Structured No Dig Bed- Build as a multi-layered bed. Make changes based on the situation. If too many weeds, layer cardboard on the bottom of the bed. If voles and mice are getting in the bed, attached 1/4" diameter hardware cloth to the bottom of the bed. If poor soil water drainage, add a layer of branches to help the water move. If too many critters, consider using elevated raised beds.

Planting Styles- Block or broadcast planting to save space.

Succession plant, interplant and sow polycultures to maximize growing space and yields while reducing watering and weeding.

No-Dig Bed Maintenance

Add a layer of compost after every harvest

Harvest trying not to disturb the soil. Cut off veggies at the soil line and leave the roots in place.

Water with drip or soaker hoses and mulch

Use **annual cover crops** that naturally die back to bed soil such as oats and peas

In fall, **chop and drop healthy plants** covering the bed with mulch for winter.

For diseased plants, **cut at the soil line and remove.** Add a layer of organic materials to protect the soil life in winter.

Use **season extenders** to garden sooner and later in the year.

No-Dig Alternatives

Straw Bale Gardening- Plant in bales of hay or straw conditioned with water and fertilizer to grow on difficult surfaces and avoid some pests.

Hugelkultur- Make hugelkultur mounds using logs and branches with other organic materials. Create a 3- to 6-foot tall mound for long term growing.

Keyhole Beds- Make a keyhole-shaped bed to save space and build a 1- to 2-foot diameter compost bin in the middle of the bed to feed the plants.

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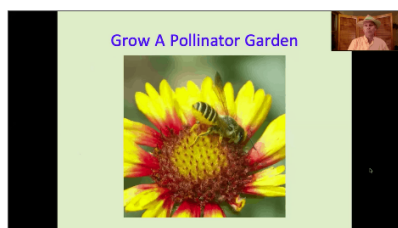
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