

# STOP DIGGING!

Save your back  
and mulch  
instead

## No Dig Gardening Benefits

- Plants grow better in undisturbed soil and mulches reduce need for watering.
- Improve your soil structure and lock in carbon.
- Healthy soil biome reduces pest impacts
- Less hard work! Hoe and dibber are the only tools needed.

## Getting started

- Cut down any tall weed foliage to ground level.
- Lay down a mulch, such as cardboard with 15cm overlapping joints, to suppress weeds or grass.
- Add a thick layer (15-20cm) of compost to form the planting substrate. Tread it down to firm it. This will be slowly incorporated into the soil by worms.
- You can use home-made compost, leafmould, well-rotted manure, green waste compost or even bagged peat-free compost.
- If it is a new bed, wait 6 months to allow any weeds to die back properly. At the end of this period any remaining should be easy to pull out of the newly friable soil.
- Plant your seedlings or sow seeds into a raked fine tilth.
- Cut plants at soil surface when harvesting rather than pulling up.
- Top up annually when beds are cleared, with a 5cm layer of compost or manure.

If you are growing perennials in a garden bed, simply apply a 5cm layer of compost in the autumn to the surface, and let the worms do the rest.

Useful resources: <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/no-dig-method>  
<https://charlesdowding.co.uk/start-here/>

## No Bare Soil - Using Green Manures

- Improve soil fertility – deep root systems access more nutrients and legumes fix nitrogen.
- They cover soil over winter to suppress weeds and protect structure.
- Maintaining year round cover retains carbon in the soil.
- Improve drought resilience
- Beneficial for insects and predators.
- Turn under or cut down 1 month before planting or before it sets seed to return organic matter to the soil.

## Popular Green Manures

Perennials that can be dug in after a few months or left for 1-2 years. Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) legume with a deep tap root and good for mulch once cut.

- Alsike clover (*Trifolium hybridum*) a legume good for wet, acid soils.
- Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) legume, attracts bees, likes loamy soils.

Autumn - winter cover

- Grazing rye (*Secale cereale*) good for soil structure, suppresses weed germination.
- Field bean (*Vicia faba*) Annual legume good for heavy soils, dig in before beans develop to capture nitrogen in the soil.
- Vetch/Winter tares (*Vicia sativa*) legume, overwinters well in heavy soils

Spring – summer gap filling

- Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) grows well on nutrient poor soils, mines phosphate and makes it available to other plants.
- Crimson clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*) prefers light soils, loved by bees.
- Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) provides a rapid boost to soil fertility.
- Mustard (*Sinapsis alba*) vigorous weed suppressant, don't grow before other brassicas.
- Phacelia (*Phacelia tanacetifolia*) attractive flowers loved by bees.
- Vetch/Winter tares (*Vicia sativa*) legume, also provides great cover sown in spring.