

No-Dig Gardening is about doing less work and getting improved results from happy soil. By not tilling, you allow the beneficial organisms in your soil to thrive undisturbed. Mother Nature does not use a spade, so why not follow her example? You simply spread a new layer of compost on top, often in the autumn.

Why Use This No-Dig Method? The no-dig method saves time and energy while preserving the overall soil structure. The soil is then able to better retain water and is resistant to erosion. Since there is no cultivation involved, there are fewer weeds because new seeds are not brought to the surface to germinate, and any that grow are easy to remove in the soft soil. By simply adding organic materials (compost), you build on the fertility of your soil to keep it rich in nutrients that make your vegetables strong and healthy, requiring no extra fertilizer. You'll find your garden is much more productive. If you have raised beds, you are essentially following a no-dig garden technique. Fill the bed with a 50:50 mix of topsoil and compost and you can plant right into the bed,

How to Create a No-Till Vegetable Garden Creating a new no-till vegetable garden is simple. It takes several months to a year for the new bed to be usable. The best time to start is in the fall so that the soil has an entire winter to prepare. First, mark out your growing areas. Make beds no more than four feet wide to avoid the need to step on the growing areas. (This helps to minimize soil compaction, which makes tilling even less necessary.) Clear the soil surface of any debris and rocks. Mow grass short or cut weeds to the ground. Add a layer at least 4 inches thick of well-rotted organic matter such as compost, or manure from a trusted supplier who can guarantee no herbicides have been used. Flatten and lay out cardboard boxes over the entire planned (or existing) bed area. Lay down with generous overlaps as the base for paths. Cover with shredded bark or similar for a non-slip surface. The cardboard will kill all grass and weeds underneath. Spread 1 to 2-inch layers of compost material over the cardboard until the pile is about 8 to 10 inches high. Optionally, you can continue adding layers to a height of 2 to 3 feet as the pile will shrink over time due to the slowly composting organic material. Leave the new bed for several months to a year, or until bed has compacted and composted into dark, rich soil. If the organic matter is still lumpy when it's time to plant, start vegetable seedlings off in plug trays or pots to transplant when they've developed a sturdy root system. Add the wood chips about two inches deep, making sure not to mix it into the compost beneath. Then simply push aside the wood chips to plant directly into the compost. This top layer helps slow down evaporation and gradually feeds the soil below, reducing the need for additional fertilizers.

At the beginning of each growing season, spread a 1- to 2-inch layer of mulch or dead leaves over the top of the bed. The mulch helps to prevent any remaining weeds from growing and keeps the soil cool and moist. After the harvest in the fall, pull out all of the plants from the season and spread them over the soil. They will add to the existing nutrients and help the next year's vegetables to grow. In no-till gardening, mulching replaces digging. The mulches protect the soil surface from erosion, help maintain soil moisture, smother weeds, add fertility and improve soil structure. It's important to keep replacing mulch as it breaks down into the soil. Suitable mulches include compost, leaf mold, wood chips, hay, grass clippings, straw and sawdust. No-till beds can be free-standing or built with sides as raised beds to contain all that extra organic matter. Regular mulching weakens weeds by smothering them and by never bringing weed seeds to the surface to germinate.