



No-Till Gardening At Home

Why No-Till?

Healthier Soils & Better Harvests

Soil is home to bacteria, insects, worms, and fungi, and they all work together to make the soil healthier. Fungi help plants by bringing them nutrients in exchange for carbohydrates, like sugar, that the plants produce. Tilling breaks up this process and decreases soil health.

Less weeding

Tilling brings weed seeds up to the surface where they can germinate, increasing weeds in your garden.

Less watering

Tilling disrupts the soil's natural ability to hold on to and conserve water, making the soil less healthy.

How to Plant

When your seedlings and garden beds are ready, poke a hole into the soil to plant. Poking a hole loosens the soil without overturning it, maintaining the soil's natural drainage abilities without bringing up weeds.

Follow the seed packet instructions for starting your seeds indoors or direct sowing them outside so you know how deep and far apart you should plant them.

Once you've planted, remember to mulch! Wood chips, straw, sawdust, grass clippings, hay, and compost are great options. Mulch prevents erosion and smothers weeds. It decomposes over time, returning nutrients to the soil.



Prepare for Next Year

Plant cover crops like barley, oats, or rye in the fall to cover your beds during the winter. Cover crops are a living mulch; they prevent soil erosion and provide the soil with nutrients.

In the spring, mow the cover crops and leave the clippings where they fall. DO NOT remove the roots from the ground - leaving the roots helps prevent erosion. Add compost and other soil amendments, and plant again!

Don't forget to rotate your crops so the soil doesn't run low on nutrients to feed your plants!

Preparing Your Beds

Pick a spot that gets at least six hours of sunlight a day. Look for a relatively flat area close to a water source with good air circulation and drainage.

Decide whether to plant in rows or beds, or both!

Make your garden beds no more than 4 feet wide and raised planting rows no more than 18 inches wide so you never have to step on them.

Walking on garden beds compacts the soil, preventing beneficial soil organisms from doing their work, so create walkways instead!

Clear the ground of large rocks and debris and cut the weeds or grass short. Lay some cardboard down first, then layer on organic matter like straw, compost, aged manure, and topsoil. You can do this in the spring or the fall - if it's spring, you'll want to add slightly more compost, manure, or topsoil, since the cardboard and straw will have less time to break down.

If you don't have space for beds, try growing in containers! Make sure they're deep enough and wide enough for the plant to have space to grow, five gallon buckets work great for tomatoes!

Take Care of Your Garden

Tend to your garden at least once a week. Chop down weeds to prevent them from going to seed and spreading. Compost or drop the weeds where they grow, as they will decompose and return nutrients to the soil over time. You can leave the roots of weeds in the soil; they will nourish the soil as they decompose. It may take a few years for weeds to stop coming back, so be patient with your garden!

Many weeds are actually edible plants, like dandelions and wild mustard greens!

Water your garden regularly. Check the soil each morning to see if it needs watering - you can test this by sticking your finger in the soil. If the soil is damp up to 6 inches below the surface, your plants have enough water.



Don't forget to take notes! Keep records of your garden to help you learn and improve next year. When did you plant? How did certain plants do? When were crops ready to harvest? How big was your harvest?