

CREATING A NEW GARDEN

Designing, preparing and planting your own garden or landscape bed can be fun and rewarding. It can also be backbreaking. Consider hiring out some of the heaviest labor unless you really enjoy that type of activity.

Outline the space of a new bed with a garden hose, which is lightweight and easy to move around. Lay the hose out on the ground where you think you would like the edge of the bed or the border of the garden to be. Look at it from several views, from inside your house looking out the windows, from the street and driveway.

If you are satisfied with the location and shape of your new bed, remove the existing grass and weeds with a shovel. Killing them with a herbicide will make this task easier. Till or dig the soil to a depth of at least 12 inches (more is better) then add 4-6 inches of compost and till it in.

The health of your soil is the most important aspect of successful gardening. Without a loose, rich soil, your plants will not be able to take up nutrients and water and will suffer. To grow big, robust plants you need healthy soil with good drainage. Building a good bed is hard work, and with the addition of organic matter, can be quite expensive. Please do not penny-pinch on soil preparation or you will be disappointed with the results.

Sandy soils quickly drain and need the addition of organic matter to hold moisture and retain nutrients for the plants to use. Clay soils are compact with poor air and water circulation. Organic matter will loosen them up and allow for better drainage.

The best soil amendment is compost. If you make your own compost that is great. Most of us have to purchase compost by the bag. We use Back to Earth cottonburr compost at the nursery and have been very satisfied with the results. A formula for figuring how many bags of compost it will take for your new bed is length x width ÷ 4 ÷ 2. Lava sand is a good addition also as it adds minerals to the soil.

After incorporating your soil amendments, spread organic fertilizer at a rate of one pound for every bag of compost you added. Rake out your soil so it is level and water it for least 15 minutes. It is best if you can let your new bed rest for a couple of weeks before planting as the compost will be activated and will have heated up.

Now your new bed has good drainage, lots of nutrients and should be easy to plant. After planting, mulch your plants with 2" of shredded hardwood or pine needles. Add about 1 inch of additional compost every other year. We recommend fertilizing three times a year with organic fertilizer. Apply this in April, the beginning of June, and again in September.

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