

Preparing Your Soil for a Vegetable Garden

or

Ten Steps to Good Garden Soil

The secret to gardening is world-class, spectacular, super-fabulous soil preparation. If you have failed before, your soil preparation may be to blame. You don't need a green thumb to have a garden; you need a brown one!

Soil is made of several components: nutrients; sand, silt, and clay particles in varying proportions; organic matter; water; air; and living organisms. Healthy soil has a balance of all of these.

This is how you can get your soil into shape for your garden.

1. Pick a suitable location. You will need sunshine, good drainage, access to water, and low traffic. You may want to start small. Leave room between rows to walk.
2. Spray weeds with herbicide or manually pull them.
3. Cover with a couple of inches of organic matter. If your soil is heavy clay, you may want to add extra organic matter. You can never have too much organic matter.
4. Thoroughly incorporate into soil with spade or tiller at least 12" deep and 18" wide if planting in rows. The new beds should be at least a couple inches higher than the old soil grade.
5. Never walk on your prepared beds. They are called "beds" for a reason. Use a planting board, if necessary.
6. Control weeds. They compete with your plants for food. Either pull, hoe, or spray them. Get yourself a "Hula Hoe." Be careful spraying and watch for drifting spray. Most herbicides will kill vegetables, too. Read the label!
7. Make sure you can get water to your garden. If you water by hand, use a water-breaker and try to keep leaves dry. Put deep heavy stakes at the end of each row so the hose won't wipe out your precious crop. Best to water early in the day. If you're having to water twice a day, consider using mulch.
8. You do not need to use a whole bag of fertilizer! When in doubt 1lb of 13-13-13 per 100 sq. ft. immediately before planting is a good place to start.
9. If your soil is absolutely terrible, you might be better off growing in raised beds that are amended with organic material.
10. Next year, do it all again. It will be easier next time! Your garden will grow better each year, and the number of weeds will steadily decline if you stay on top of them.

Suitable organic matter sources:

- Well-composted manure
- Composted yard debris
- Ready-to-use compost
- Coconut coir
- Peat moss
- Pre-made potting mixes
- Worm castings

Do not use raw manure or plant residue like straw or sawdust!

Hose-stopping stakes

