

What can I do if my garden has been taken over by Bermuda grass?

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Q: During the drought I let my site go unplanted and now it has been taken over by Bermuda grass. Is there any way to get rid of this weed without using pesticides? I try to grow using organic practices in my garden.

A: The technique of Lasagna Gardening sounds like the perfect answer to your weed problem. Lasagna Gardening, also known as Sheet Composting or Sheet Mulching, smothers weeds while providing a rich garden bed for your vegetables. The most difficult part of this gardening method is waiting for nature to do most of the work for you. In Lasagna Gardening you build the soil just like we prepare a lasagna, one layer at a time; then we let nature complete the soil enrichment for us.

To start building your garden beds using this technique, you will need to collect non-waxy cardboard, newspaper, manure (from non-meat eating animals), grass clippings, leaves, compost, sawdust, etc. You need enough of each to cover your beds with each ingredient in at least a 1-3 inch layer.

Choose the area where you want to start and wet the soil thoroughly, letting it soak in overnight if very dry. Then, clear off or mow all existing plants and cover the area evenly with 1-3 inches of manure Next, lay cardboard in a solid layer over the area where the Bermuda grass is growing make sure to cover all areas that contain the weed. Make sure you overlap so that there is no soil left uncovered. Next add a mulch layer, this can be a very thick layer, up to 20 inches deep. This layer will

contain nitrogen-rich materials, such as non-invasive weeds or lawn clippings, manure, coffee grounds and kitchen vegetable scraps, and carbon-rich materials to cover this nitrogen-rich layer. The carbon layer is the dry things: wood chips, leaves, straw, sawdust, dead plants and pine needles. Make the nitrogen and carbon material layers roughly the same depth. Have at least 3" depth in each layer. On top of all the mulch, layer more newspapers, preferably 4 papers thick. Wet all the layers down well, and then add the planting layer.

For the planting layer, you can layer 2" or so of peat moss to hold the moisture, or just go straight to composted humus or garden soil at least 3" thick, thicker if you plan to transplant 4" plants. On top of this planting layer you can plant your seeds or seedling. You can finish off the bed with mulch or straw to keep the weeds down.

The bed building process can be spread out over time so that you build one layer one day and another the next, or lay all the layers in one afternoon. Whichever strategy you choose it needs to be done a couple of months in advance of planting the garden. While fall is the best time to put down these layers or sheets of different compostable components, this process can be done at any time of the year as long as you allow a couple of months before planting and you keep the layers moist.

In addition to suppressing weeds this process builds rich fertile soil, Lasagna Gardening also helps conserve energy and improve the sustainability of the garden. It conserves moisture in the soil, which in turn conserves water, and reuses materials that are probably landfill bound. This gardening method will last for several years if left alone, and indefinitely if you occasionally add more sheets of materials to leach down nutrients into the ever-improving soil. You don't have to build expensive raised gardens to accommodate the height, just pile it all up.. Over

time the pile will shrink, and the plants will grow. You can get more detailed information on this gardening method from the U.C. Davis Master Gardener website <http://ucanr.edu/sites/MarinMG/?story=662>