

Comparing 3 ways to build your soil

View our composting & soil building workshops and videos on Nevada County Master Gardeners website <http://ncmg.ucanr.org>

Hot compost batch pile

Can be done any time of year. Spring convenient since lots of weeds (greens) are available. But any time is good!

Convenient place or where you plan to plant.

Can use any browns & greens—from kitchen waste and garden trimmings to horse manure and chicken coop bedding.

Most efficient on a larger scale. Small piles are good too, just slower.

The pile will kill weed annual weeds/seeds underneath or prevent from germinating.

More work up front.

Less work later. Just cover and let it sit 6 months. Then move as needed to top dress beds with 2" compost before planting.

Can store "done" compost (covered) and use any time.

Large compost pile most efficient

- When you have lots of browns & greens plus kitchen waste
- When you need a lot of compost but don't have your beds ready yet
- When it's easier for you to concentrate your efforts in one location, then later move the "done" compost where needed

Lasagna bed [aka sheet mulch]

Can be done any time of year. Spring convenient since lots of weeds (greens) are available. But any time is good!

Where you plan to plant.

Can use any brown & greens that critters won't get into (not deep enough to keep critters out of kitchen waste).

Efficient on any scale.

Use cardboard underneath to prevent weed seeds in soil from germinating.

Less work up front.

No work later! Let it sit 6 months, then plant directly into it.

Can let it sit until ready to plant.

Lasagna first THEN cover crop if you are starting with a compacted area full of annual weeds. In spring you can use a layer of cardboard (to choke out annual weeds) then layer your lasagna bed over it. In fall plant a deep-rooted cover crop in it that specializes in breaking up compacted soil. In early spring take it down and apply a top mulch layer. When warm enough, plant summer crops directly into your beautiful, rich, no-till bed full of soil life.

Or prepare a lasagna bed in fall. Plant BUCKWHEAT the following spring. Take it down in summer and let it decompose so ready for cool-season crops by fall.

Cover crop

Timing constraints: For cool-season cover crops, plant only in fall. For summer cover crop (buckwheat), plant during warm season only.

Where you plan to plant—but must be cleared first.

Just buy cover crop seed (with inoculant for legumes). Many special-purpose kinds to choose from. Use pine needles or leaves on top, or buy rice straw.

Efficient on any scale. And versatile—you can fill in any extra spaces with cover crop!

Must be planted in an area you have cleared and prepared. Will outcompete ungerminated weeds.

Least work up front.

A little more work later. Chop down to compost in place for 6 weeks before planting. Leave roots in the ground to decompose there.

Timing required: chop down before more than about 30% of it has flowered.

