No Dig Garden Fact Sheet

What is No-Dig Eco Gardening?

This type of garden is built above the ground using layers of newspaper, compost, straw, lucerne hay and manure to create soil rather than digging and planting into the existing soil. It's also known as Lasagne Gardening!

No Dig Gardening creates a healthy soil by decomposing all the layers, much the same way that composting does.

There are some big advantages;

- You can make one over concrete, rocky areas or poor soil
- It reduces waste by using your old newspapers
- Saves you money by not having to buy new soil
- Saves you time and effort by not having to turn and digthe soil over.
- You can start planting into it straight away

Easy steps to building a No-Dig Eco Garden.

Many people are now experimenting with this layering system and using different ingredients and combinations. The picture shows the original layering method using one bale of lucerne hay and one bale of straw for a bed 2m x 1.8m.

Listed below is another version;

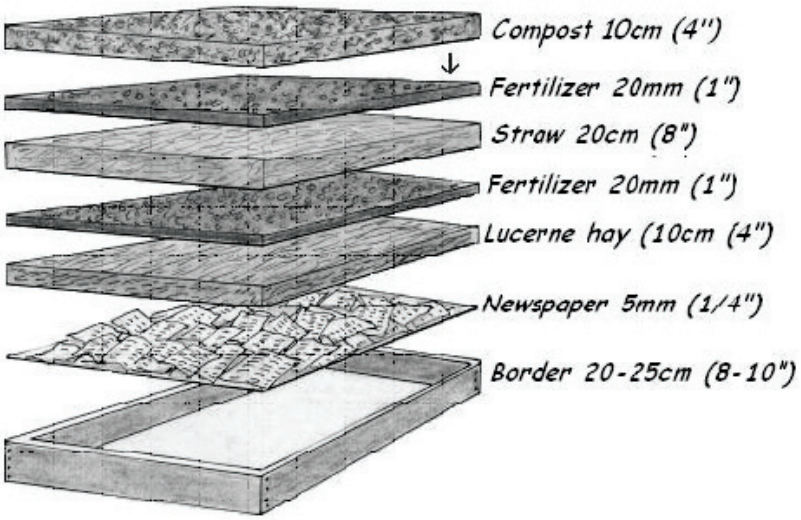
1. Select a sunny location for your No Dig Garden.

2. Edge the area with bricks, concrete blocks or scraps of timber.

HORNSBY SHIRE COUNCIL

3. Put down the following layers:

- (Over rock or hard clay only) 5cm layer of overlapping sticks
- Soaking wet newspaper about 1.5cm thick, overlapping well
- 2cm layer of fertiliser ie blood n bone, chicken manure, compost
- 10cm deep wads of soaking wet lucerne hay
- 2cm layer of fertiliser ie blood n bone, chicken manure, compost
- 20cm of loose soaking wet straw as a final mulch layer.



4. Plant your seedlings:

- Pull apart where you want to plant
- Place a handful of well decomposed compost or potting mix
- Plant seeds or seedlings

5. Stake (if needed) and water the seedlings.

Tip – Lucerne Hay has more green leafy matter which is higher in nitrogen and nutrients than straw which is mainly stalk.

Ongoing Management of the Garden.

Over time, the layers of materials will decompose and reduce in size. This is an important part of making healthy soil full of nutrient rich and moisture retaining humus and being a perfect habitat for essential bugs, worms, micro organisms and bacteria. You can simply create more layers over the top.

1. Cut at the base all finished fruit and vegetables and place in your compost

2. Add more layers

- Soaking wet newspapers only if you need to smother weeds
- Fertilisers
- Lucerne

3. Plant, stake and water

Other Soil Improving Techniques for your No Dig Garden.

Crop Rotation

This method means putting fruit and vegetables in different spots to where they were last. By rotating them, one set of crops can be beneficial to the next and also allows diseases to break down before the same crop is planted there again. Rotation can be by family or physical attribute.

- Legumes (peas, beans, broad beans, etc) plants high in nitrogen.
- Leaf crops (lettuce, cabbage, celery, silver beet etc).
- Fruit crops or flowers (tomatoes, zucchini, melons, squash, flowers etc).
- Root crops (carrots, onions, potatoes, beetroot, radish, turnip, etc).
- Fallow, at least 2 months. Let weeds grow and green manure crop.
- Fruit crops and flowers (tomatoes, zucchini, melons, squash, flowers etc.

Green Manure Crops

These are crops grown purely for the purpose of improving the soil. There roots are particularly good at extracting nutrients so it's important to cut it down before the plant starts putting it's energy into flowering. Once cut, the leaves can be used a fertilising layer in the No Dig Garden or into the compost.

- Warm season green manure crops include Buckwheat, Cowpea, Millet, Mungbean
- Cool season green manure crops include Fenugreek, Wooly Pod Vetch, Oats, Fava Bean.

Companion planting

This involves putting plants together that compliment each other, this can include;

- Plants that grow better in each others company (ie strawberries and borage).
- Plants that hide another plant from pests either visually or by scent (Chives and Peaches).
- Plants that can be used to support another (ie corn stalk supporting beans).

As well as referring to a companion planting guide, observe and experiment to see what works in your own garden.

For more information and other topics see Hornsby Council's range of Eco Gardening fact sheets.