



Growing Food Without Digging

No-Dig Gardening

The Kitchen Garden

By growing a simple kitchen garden we can minimise our waste and make productive use of urban space. It is easy even on a small balcony or deck to create our own herb and vegetable ecosystems. We can do this in containers or pots the no dig way.

What is a no dig garden?

When we make a no dig vegetable garden we rely on nature to do most of the work.

We try to create a sandwich of layers from recycled materials such as manures, newspapers and straw. The mulch layer acts like the leaf layer in the forest which nourishes the soil.

Mulch in our no-dig gardens;

- reduces soil moisture loss and weed growth
- buffers soil from temperature extremes
- reduces run-off/ erosion during heavy rain
- breaks down into nutrients to feed plants

Re-using Materials for containers or garden edging

Your no dig garden in containers or edged re-uses waste. Containers can be large pots, pails, buckets, wire baskets, bushel baskets, wooden boxes, nursery flats, window planters, washtubs, strawberry pots, plastic bags, large tin cans; anything wide at the top with a hole in the bottom) or edging materials might be recycled wood, bricks or tiles.

The Garden in pots

Your container garden is limited by your imagination. Dwarf varieties or vegetables that take up little space, such as carrots, radishes and lettuce, or fruiting crops, such as tomatoes and peppers are perfect for your potted garden

Try mixing it up in there. Plant an eggplant, and some herbs all in a large container. They grow well together and will keep the pests away.

Multi functional garden design. Source: Eden on your Balcony





You will need:

- Newspapers
- One bale lucerne hay (lucerne contains nitrogen, one of the main plant nutrients), straw (from hardware store or nursery) or stable sweepings (a combination of hay and horse manure; let the stable sweepings sit for a few months to compost before use in the garden)
- Compost (made at home or purchased)
- Organic fertilizer (if your soil is sandy; such as manure, vermicast, blood & bone, etc)
- Seeds and/or seedlings
- Water

Building a no dig garden

1. Choose a site:

Select an accessible and sunny spot (minimum 4 hours per day) that is protected from winds.

2. Start Layering:

- Carbon: Covering the base of the pots controls weeds and leakage. Moisten sheets of newspaper (about 1.5 cm thick) or cardboard.
- Nitrogen: Apply 10cm of lucerne hay or fresh green plant material, sprinkle with organic fertilizer and soak with water.
- Carbon: follow the nitrogen layer with about 20cm of carbon material, such as straw, dry leaves, wood chips, or other dry brown plants material. Sprinkle with organic fertilizer and water well
- Repeat! Continue alternating nitrogen-carbon layers until you get the height you need.

3. Mulch

Lay mulch such as composted stable sweepings/straw/Lucerne hay on top of the nitrogen layer for about 10cms thick.

4 Plant

In the last carbon layer, make little pockets (holes) and fill with compost to form a small mound about 10cm deep and 45cm across.

Plant seeds or seedlings into compost mounds and water well. Water the bed each day for the first week so the plants can become established.

5. Caring for you No-dig Garden

Successive gardens can be built on the same spot, either to the same original design, or just by topping up the first garden with one or two layers of organic material and fertilizer.

References & Further Reading

The Watershed Sustainability Resource Centre, 218 King Street Newtown, 9519 6366

www.sgaonline.org.au

Sustainable Gardening Australia: Information, advice and resources.

www.theveggielady.com

The Veggie Lady: Growing healthy, organic food in your backyard.

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Project SafeCom Inc.: Ten Steps to an Organic Permaculture No-dig Garden.

Gilbert A, 2003, No-dig Gardening: How to Create an Instant, Low-Maintenance Garden, ABC Books, Sydney NSW

Deans E, 2002, No-dig Gardening & Leaves of Life, HarperCollins Publishers, Pymble, Sydney NSW