

No-Dig Gardening

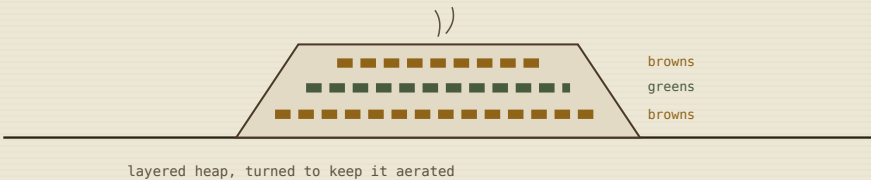
Build fertile beds by layering, without turning the soil

DIFFICULTY Easy
TYPE One-off build, ongoing maintenance
TIME Half a day per bed

 DIFFICULTY Easy	 TIME Half a day/bed	 COST Low-moderate	 BEST SEASON Any time, ideally autumn for a spring bed	 FREQUENCY Topped up each season
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01 Sheet layers smother and build

A no-dig bed is built directly on top of existing ground — cardboard smothers weeds and grass below, while layers of compost and mulch above create a fertile growing medium without digging or tilling at all.



02 What you'll need

- Cardboard (uncoated, tape removed) or newspaper
- Compost, aged manure, or a soil mix
- Straw or another mulch for the top layer
- Optional: a timber or other edging to contain the bed

03 Method

1. Mow or slash existing growth low, then lay cardboard directly over the area, overlapping generously.
2. Wet the cardboard thoroughly to help it break down and stay in place.
3. Layer compost and aged manure on top, building up to at least 15–20cm depth.
4. Top with a mulch layer to retain moisture and suppress any weeds pushing through gaps.
5. Plant directly into the top layer — seedlings work better than direct-sown seed in the first season while the layers are still settling.

04 Troubleshooting

- **Weeds coming through** — gaps in the cardboard layer; overlap more generously next time, or patch gaps with extra cardboard.
- **Bed sinking significantly** — normal as layers settle and compost breaks down; top up each season.
- **Poor growth in the first season** — layers may not have broken down enough yet; established no-dig beds generally improve markedly by year two.
- **Persistent perennial weeds (like couch grass) coming through** — a single cardboard layer may not be enough for very vigorous weeds; consider extra suppression measures first.

05 Timing & maintenance

BEST TIME	Autumn is ideal, giving the layers time to break down before spring planting, though it can be built any time.
DURATION	Initial build takes half a day; the bed improves and matures over the following seasons.
MAINTENANCE	Top up compost and mulch each season as layers settle and break down.
SIGNS OF SUCCESS	Rich, dark, crumbly soil developing at the cardboard interface, and strong plant growth without ever having dug the bed.

06 Tips & variations

PAIRS WELL WITH

Raised Bed Building

Mulching

COMMON MISTAKES

Leaving gaps in the cardboard layer that let weeds through

Not building the compost layer deep enough for good results in the first season

PRO TIP

Start a no-dig bed in autumn over an area you want cleared for spring — it doubles as weed suppression while it builds fertility.