

# Lasagna Gardening

## A Garden of Layers

Lasagna Gardening is a nontraditional organic gardening method that relies on a layering method called “sheet composting”. The name “Lasagna” comes from the way garden beds are created from layers, the same way you layer ingredients when making a pan of lasagna. Watering and weeding are reduced through the heavy layers of mulch and by planting crops close together. The lasagna layering method quickly builds soils that are incredibly rich in nutrients, resulting in higher than average garden productivity. The method also works great for container gardening.

## What Makes It Different

Thick layers of organic mulch are the main ingredients of every lasagna garden. Chopped leaves, grass clippings, straw, hay, sawdust, wood ash, compost, animal manure, newspaper, etc. are just some of the materials that might make up the layers of a lasagna garden. Individual materials will vary in each individual’s garden according to what is available locally.

## How Do You Make a Lasagna Garden?

To make a lasagna garden you stake out your garden site and begin building up the beds layer by layer. The first layer involves laying down something heavy over sod, like thick pads of newspaper or flattened cardboard boxes, to kill the existing grass. The next layer should consist of 2-3 inches of a water absorbent material like coir, or peat moss. Coir is recommended because of the growing environmental damage caused by extracting peat from bogs. Next, a 4-8 inch layer of organic material, such as compost, is spread over the coir/peat layer. Another layer of coir, or a peat alternative would be added on top of that, and then yet another layer of organic material, like grass clippings on top of the coir, and on and on until the beds reach 18-24 inches high. Finally, the top of the piles may be sprinkled lightly with bone meal and wood ash for added phosphorus and potassium.

## “Baking” the Beds

At this point, some gardeners elect to “cook” their lasagna gardens (give the layers of mulch time to breakdown). This reduces the height of the beds and produces high-quality workable soil more quickly. Cooking the beds is optional, but certainly not necessary. One of the greatest advantages to the lasagna gardening methods is that you can layer your beds and plant your crops all in the same day.

## Planting a Lasagna Garden

When you’re planting a lasagna garden, no digging is required. For transplants, simply pull back the layers of mulch, drop in the plant and pull some mulching materials back over the roots. Sowing seeds is easy too. Sprinkle a little finished compost over the area you want to plant, sow the seed, and cover with a little more of the finished compost. Press down on the bed to secure the seeds and water thoroughly. It’s that easy!

Because it uses no power tools, heavy equipment or expensive commercial additives, lasagna gardening is an easy way for people with space, age or physical limitations to maintain garden productivity.

## Building a Lasagna Garden

By Sandra Hoke, Certified Texas Master Gardener, Orange County Master Gardeners Association

Make a containment area for your garden if possible.

Always start out with the following:

1. Thick layer of wet newspaper goes on top of the ground after stomping down grass & weeds. Cardboard can be used. No need to pull weeds or grass.
2. Peat moss goes on top of wet newspapers as it holds in moisture

The following layers can be in any order:

3. Compost (from your compost pile, or you can use bagged compost)
4. Composted aged manure
5. Coffee grounds with filters (optional)
6. Shredded newspaper (tear or use paper shredder, do not use colored sections)
7. Compost (to put on top of newspaper so it won't blow away)
8. Mulched leaves if available, if not piles of leaves.
9. Bone meal (goes on as the final ingredient if you have available)

This is always last:

10. Water, water, water

You can let this "cook" under plastic for weeks or you can plant in it right away. Or you can prepare in the fall and plant in the spring. If you plant right away, you must plant grown plants, as seed will not germinate until it has cooked for a while and composted down. Each fall you should add more leaves as well as coffee grounds to your bed to keep it activated.

If you don't already have a compost pile, you can start with vegetable and fruit peels, eggshells, grass clippings, etc. Keep it mixed every week or so to aerate so it will break down.

Happy Gardening!