



Sheila O'Riley, *The Ugly Gardener*

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Some say Sheila's style of no-till or sheet mulch gardening is *ugly* due to all the *trash* left and added to her gardens.

Sheila says, "I think my gardens are beautiful. The heavy layers of mulch conserve moisture, hold weeds down, build the soil structure, and save the soil from eroding. The same benefits farmers get from no-till farming"



Basic No-till Garden Recipe

Just like a basic cake recipe, the ingredients listed can be varied and embellished. This will make an approximately 4 foot x 4 foot garden. This method will be especially enjoyed by gardeners who are busy, don't like to pull weeds, and don't have time to water.

- 40 Sheets of Newspaper
- 5-gallon bucket 2/3 full of water
- 40 lb. bag of composted manure
- 1 leaf cart or garbage bag full of chipped wood
- 1 leaf cart or garbage bag full of dried leaves (preferably chopped)
- 1 leaf cart or garbage bag full of grass clippings (fresh is best)
- 1-2 gallons good garden soil or potting soil
- Water

Put newspapers in bucket of water to completely wet. Open paper and lay on ground (over grass, weeds, old driveway, etc.) 4-6 sheets thick. Overlap edges. This becomes the weed barrier and will eventually compost. Spread composted manure over paper to attract the worms and other helpful soil organisms. The following layers should each be 2-4 inches deep. Spread wood chips next (this first layer should be coarse enough to allow air circulation). May need to use a rake to level—somewhat anyway. Water. Next layer is the dried leaves followed by grass clippings; leveling with rake if necessary and watering after each layer. You may plant into this garden right away or allow to *cook* (or compost) over a period of time. To plant seeds in a row, open up a furrow in the layers with a hoe or rake (I like to use my hands), spread in a one inch deep strip of soil, lay the seeds on the soil and cover with the recommended amount of additional soil. To transplant from a pot, simple open up a hole in the layers, set the plant in, (if desired, add a handful of soil around the soil ball of the plant) and pull the mulch back up around it. To broadcast seed, mix the seed in some soil and toss the soil around on the top of the garden.

If you find you need more garden space, simply add on. You can substitute or add any other organic material suitable for composting such as compost, chopped corn cobs, hay, cardboard boxes (for the weed barrier), shredded office paper, peat moss, sawdust, chopped stalks, straw, wood ashes, organic kitchen scraps, etc.

Although, you won't enjoy eating this recipe like a cake, you will enjoy eating the food it produces or enjoy seeing the beauty of the flowers and ornamental plants grown in it.

Resource Books: *Lasagna Gardening* by Patricia Lanza, *Weedless Gardening* by Lee Reich, *No-work Gardening* by Ruth Stout



ORGANIC MATERIAL THAT CAN BE USED TO BUILD A NO-TILL GARDEN

by Sheila O'Riley, *The Ugly Gardener*

When you are building a no-till garden, you are actually building a low and long compost pile. Therefore; anything you know about building a compost pile applies to building a no-till garden. Any organic material can be used.

A compost pile or no-till garden requires four elements for the earthworms and friendly organisms to do their composting business. They are air, water, nitrogen, and carbon. Air is easy enough to provide. That's why we start building the no-till garden with coarser material such as sticks or chipped wood as these allow air to circulate under the rest of the layers. Water should be added to each layer as you build the no-till garden. Normal rainfall should be enough for the rest of the year as our goal is not to facilitate quick composting, but to allow the material to remain on top of the surface of the garden as mulch during the growing season in order to control weeds and lessen the need for watering. During long droughts, watch your plants for signs of wilting or stress and water as you see fit.

Nitrogen sources are green plant material including fruits and vegetables, livestock manure, and nitrogen fertilizer. Carbon sources are brown or dried plant material. Most of the material you will use for a no-till garden may be brown (carbon) material during the growing season. You might want to make an effort to add green (nitrogen) material late in the fall after crops are harvested or plants are frosted to facilitate the composting process during the off season. The goal would be to have a mixture of half green material and half brown material. You don't need to mix it; just layer it. This will add nutrients to your garden for the next season. Then next season just add more mulch material as needed. If weeds or grass have grown through, add more layers of newspapers or other organic weed barrier.

Green material (high in nitrogen)

Grass clippings (fresh)
Livestock manure
Garden clippings (fresh)
Vegetable and fruit scraps
Houseplant clippings
Pine needles (fresh)
Nitrogen fertilizer

Note: If any of these materials are dry, then they are brown carbon material.

DO NOT USE as they attract varmints

Meats
Dairy foods
Fats, oil, or grease
Pet wastes



Brown material (high in carbon)

*Newspapers
*Uncoated junk mail
*Cardboard (shipping boxes, cereal boxes, etc)
Sticks
Chipped wood (avoid walnut as is toxic to plants)
Fall or dry leaves (avoid walnut)
Straw or hay
Sawdust
Shredded paper
Dry paper products such as paper towels
Egg shells
Coffee grounds (including the filters)
Tea bags
Dry grass clippings
Hair
Feathers
Lint

* If not used as the weed barrier (bottom of the layers), rip into small pieces.