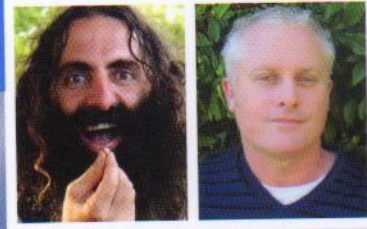


WellBeing

# Organic Garden Project Book

WITH COSTA & TERRY



ORGANIC GROWING GUIDE FOR **42** FRUITS, VEGETABLES, AND HERBS

7 TOOLS TO GET YOUR GARDEN STARTED

CREATING A BOUNTIFUL SOIL

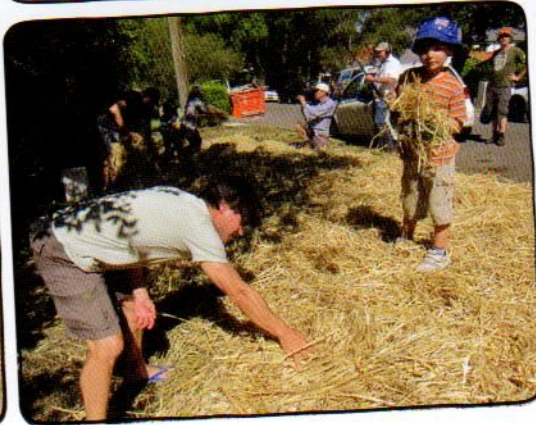
SOIL TO SOCIETY  
WHY YOU SHOULD GO ORGANIC

**LEARN** the art of composting  
**DISCOVER** the science of crop rotation  
**MAKE** your garden a wildlife sanctuary

PEST CONTROL WITHOUT CHEMICALS  
**COMPANION PLANTING** WHEN PLANTS GET ALONG  
GOING ORGANIC IN POTS ON BALCONIES



Find the healing power of your organic garden



# Don't dig it

"NO-DIG" GARDENS CAN SEEM LIKE A CONTRADICTION. IN FACT, NO-DIG GARDENS MAKE YOU THE MASTER OF YOUR SOIL AND OFFER MANY OTHER BENEFITS AS WELL.

**T**he "no-dig" garden can seem like a bit of a strange concept to a new gardener, leading them up with questions like, "How do you not dig when you are gardening?", "Isn't a shovel the first thing you pick up when you go outside?", or "What will I do if I am not digging?". The idea of the no-dig garden was originally developed by Esther Dean back in the 1970s. She was frustrated when trying to grow a garden in heavy clay soil, so she decided to just build it above the clay. So, from Esther's frustration, the no-dig garden phenomena began. Today, this simple technique, begun by Esther and her husband, has been used — and is continually being adapted — by gardeners everywhere.

## WHAT IS "NO DIG"?

The no-dig garden is exactly what it says ... you don't dig. That means you don't need to get out there and start digging up the grass or soil where you plan to put your garden. All you do is start with the existing ground level, be it grass, clay, gravel, mulch or soil, and build the no-dig garden layer by layer on top. When explaining this method of building a garden to children, it is easily understood by saying we are making a lasagne with lots of layers, one on top of the other. Most kids know or eat lasagna, so the concept hooks them in straightaway and they don't look back.

**TOP:** A step-by-step view of the transformation of Costa's verge into a "no dig" garden.

So let's start cooking with the no-dig method. It's really easy and the best part about it is actually looking around and sourcing the ingredients for your gourmet dish. Yes, creating the food for your plants to dine on.

## LAYERING: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE INGREDIENTS

If you are going to be building a tasty, nutritious, mineral dense soil for your plants to dine on then it stands to reason that you need to add as broad a variety of ingredients as you can get your hands on. However, in saying that, we also want to be realistic and not cross the Earth, either physically or with a purchase order, to try and satisfy one person's recipe. This is a really simple way for you to get involved with the whole concept of localisation: buying or acquiring things from close to home. That means using things like lawn mower clippings, leaves, manure, gra-

## CASE STUDY: Leonie Shanahan

When it comes to no-dig gardening, Leonie Shanahan has been using this technique in schools and gardens with great success. In her book, *“Eat Your Garden”*, Shanahan outlines what it is that makes the no-dig method so simple and yet so successful. “Australian soils are old and tired and we need to add ‘food’ to them to bring life into our vegetable beds. No-dig gardens are fun to set up and can be planted into within weeks, and then you will have produce that is bursting out of the ground absolutely filled with goodness that you can feel and taste.”

Shanahan has been running an Edible School Garden program on the Sunshine Coast, where she works with staff and students to bring the importance of growing and eating fresh food into the daily play space of children. In each garden, she sees certain patterns of success repeat themselves. She says, “The health of the vegetables — they grow quickly, but not force-fed unnaturally — as well as their colour and texture is vibrant and the plants are not

bothered by pests. No-dig gardens are creating a life-force in the soil that is supporting these plants fully.”

Shanahan sees the big picture in terms of the no-dig system being the starting point of building a garden ecosystem from the soil up, saying, “If you put the hard work in at the start, you will reap the rewards.” She connects the importance of soil health with plant and produce health and then, of course, to our human health.

“What is happening in our soil is reflected in our plants and our health. There are no short cuts; we need to support our soil by having compost systems, adding minerals, worm castings, mulch etc — all materials to create an abundance of life in the soil. If you want to be truly healthy and vibrant, you need to grow soil fertility for your food.”

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weed and plant off-cuts, woodchip, mulch, manure. In other words, use anything that has ever been alive at some point in time and is now either still green and drying up or is already dry. Then there are a few other little ingredients that people have added to their recipes that add different qualities; things like liquid seaweed, fish fertiliser, feed-grade molasses, or rock dust (specifically crushed rock).

The most important thing to note as a beginner is to get out there and just get what you can first up. The last thing you want or need is too much pressure on yourself to dig up some mulch, crushed pine needle from the cousin of the noble pine that's only available in the very wilderness of an obscure state of Belarus that no one has ever heard of, just to put a layer on your no-dig garden. Start by using what you can and when you are underway and observing just what the method is all about. Otherwise, you can read about it and be waiting around forever.

### NO-DIG: STEP BY STEP

A no-dig garden can be placed on top of existing grass, soil or even a gravel area. When you know where you want to put it, the first step is to mow the lawn down flat or prune around any weeds or green growth that is there and leave it there, as it will be covered and break down. Then it is time to begin.

1 Sprinkle rock dust and dolomite over the shape of the no-dig garden. You can use dolomite as a set-out chalk, so you know the extent of the new garden. Then do the same with rock dust. This serves to add minerals to the existing ground, which will be accessed by your plants in coming seasons when the no-dig layers and the existing ground have become one big fertile soil sponge for your plants. Spread about one handful over each square metre.

2 If you have grass clippings or green waste, cover the area to about 10cm with this and water.

3 Now if you have grass or an existing garden area that it is going on, the next step is to lay down a layer of cardboard to create a barrier between the existing ground and the fresh no-dig layers above. Cardboard boxes are available every week or even every day outside the shops in your area, as well as on council recycling days in your street. Look around the industrial areas of your municipality and see who is putting out their surplus of this free resource. Give the cardboard a good soak.

4 Next, add a 150mm (approx.) layer of lucerne or straw. Water this in.

5 On top of the first lucerne layer, add your first layer of manure. This can be cow or sheep manure, or even fresh chicken scratchings, straw manure, from your coop or a neighbour's coop.

6 Water the manure in with a mixture of feed-grade molasses mixed at a rate of two

tablespoons per nine-litre watering can. Mix this well, so that what you are watering in looks like dark tea but smells sweet and yummy, as though you are about to have pancakes for breakfast.

7 Add another layer of Lucerne or straw approx. 150mm x 20mm thick.

8 Now it's time for another manure layer. You can go with a second cow manure layer or you can use chicken pellets or sheep manure. The intention is to do two or three layers of manure and it is ideal if you can have a mix of at least two for mineral variety. Don't sweat it if you only have cow manure ... that will be fine, but chicken pellets are readily available too. Water this in with either the molasses mix or you can use seaweed solution or fish emulsion if that's all you can find.

9 Add another layer of lucerne or straw and then you can put in a layer of compost, either your own home-grown stuff, if you have it, or whatever you can get locally. Water this in and you can add some worm castings to the layer too, if you have a worm farm.

10 Add another layer of straw mulch and water in with seaweed or fish emulsion to dilution directions as per the label.

11 Finish with another layer of compost and sprinkle some rock dust over this. Water in with seaweed/fish emulsion again.

12 Complete your creation with a layer of straw, and water in.

13 The final two layers are what you could call a seal from the layers with manure, which will be breaking down quite rapidly at the start and would burn your seedlings if you planted in

them. This style of layering enables you to plant, should you wish to on the day. That's great for kids, as they want things to get growing quickly. Ideally, though, you should leave it for a few weeks to settle, making sure that you water it so it has the perfect moisture and humidity for all the microbes and soil decomposition workers to multiply and do their job: turning your masterpiece into rich humus.

### THE ORGANIC QUESTION

Is a no-dig garden organic or not? Of course, you can set yourself the serious task of saying that you only want organic inputs into your no-dig garden. This is a fair call. However, this is all about getting growing.

Perhaps it is best to begin the process of transition by noting where, what and how you acquired something and what its origin was: conventional, organic, free of chemicals, biodynamic and so on. This way, you are building your awareness of what is out there in your area and what it is you need to get in from a distance, and the trade-offs along the way.

The default position for you at this point is get started, get conscious and then get talking with everyone around you about where you can start to source things. Even better, start thinking and talking with like-minded “no diggers” and other gardeners about gathering materials collectively. Then the collective community garden of your part of the world is set into motion. This is what it's all about: growing and sharing together. 🌱