



Black Creek Garden Resource Network 2017

Bed Preparation Tips & Tricks

Remove sod and weeds

- Sod cutter (rental tool)
- Hand Tools - shovels and spade

Aerate and loosen soil to allow for root growth, air underground for roots.

- Broad fork
- Regular garden forks
- Shovel
- Loosen rather than "flip" soil as much as possible to minimize disturbing sub soil eco-system

Till entire garden area (if soil is really compacted and forking only creates big clumps)

- Rototiller (rental)
- Caution not to "overtill" - this creates "hard pan"
- Light tilling - do not "pulverize soil". This is destructive to soil life and organisms, increases compaction during rains, and reduces aeration.

Mound soil to create "raised beds" (optional - it is common practice, but not a necessity.)

- Common reasons and benefits:
 - For soils with poor drainage - "raising" soil speeds up drainage in spring time when soil tends to be wet and soil dries faster
 - One way to create a deeper soil depth for plants
 - Creates clear pathways and prevents or decreases walking on top of the growing area or beds, less compaction in beds = maintaining light loose soil ideal for plants
 - In some situations, pathways made purposely deep to collect water in the pathways, then water seeps into beds from the side and waters them.
- Exception - when you may not want to mound soil
 - If your soil is really sandy - do not need more drainage
- Steps:
 - 1) mark your "beds" - ideal 2 to 3 feet wide. 2 or 2.5 ft. a good width - can straddle bed, and also reach across the bed when working in the pathways. More options for different body positions when working - better ergonomics. Mark edges of beds with a string.
 - 2) Recommended pathway width - minimum 1 ft. Make them wider to accommodate wheelchairs or walkers, etc. if you need. 2 ft. is a good average width that allows easy maneuvering
 - 3) orientation - if you site is sloped, position your beds across the slope so when water collects in pathways, you are not creating channels for water to run down the slope. We want to keep this water that is collected in the pathways.

- 4) Technique
 - use spade instead of shovel to make pathways - creates flat rather than curved pathways - easier for walking.
 - Mound soil from pathways onto your bed area
- 5) Once beds are “mounded”, use shovel, forks, and rake to further break up any clumps
- 6) Finish off beds by raking top of beds to flatter them out slightly for planting
- 7) Option to mulch pathways with wood chips or straw mulch