

# THE EDIBLE GARDEN

OCTOBER 2015

## LOVE AT FIRST SITE

*Dale Odorizzi*  
*Master Gardener of Lanark county*

For some time now, you have been dreaming about vegetables grown, harvested and eaten from your own little plot of land. To make this happen, first think **site selection**.

To be productive, most vegetables require lots of sun—a minimum of six hours per day, eight hours is better. Take the time now to study your yard and record the amount of direct sun each area receives. A flat space is better than a slope but if the slope is sunny and flat areas are shaded it is possible to work the slope to your advantage.

Beware of a location at the bottom of a slope. Water runs downhill and your nice, sunny, flat garden plot might be flooded before spring is over. Frost tends to be more severe in low lying areas so be prepared for an early frost. My good news is that for the past 15 years, my vegetable garden has thrived in a low lying area. I have built up my beds so they are no longer a muddy mess in the spring and the benefit is I rarely have to water my garden all summer long.

Vegetables do not like a lot of competition from weeds or tree roots. Roots from a tree will extend well beyond the drip line (the outermost circumference of the tree canopy). They are greedy feeders and will take the nutrients planned for your garden. Once established, your vegetable garden will be producing for a long time and trees continue to grow. Weeds will be an ongoing problem.

Size is important. How big do you want your garden to be? The answer to this question depends on a lot of things. How much land is available? How much time and effort is available for the garden? What types of vegetables and fruits do you want to grow? How many plants do you want to grow? My advice to a new vegetable gardener is to start small. It is better to have a garden that is too small than to have one that is abandoned because of all the work involved creating and maintaining it. 10-20 square metres will produce a lot of food!

## DOUBLE DIGGING, LASAGNA GARDENING

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**DOUBLE DIGGING** is a time honoured technique for preparing a new garden bed. In a nutshell, double digging involves removing the topsoil to the depth of your shovel, setting that soil aside and then loosening the subsoil another spade's depth. Soil amendments are put on top of the subsoil and the topsoil is returned to the trench. This labor-intensive method provides an excellent rooting zone for the plants.

Double digging improves aeration of the soil, facilitates root penetration and is especially recommended for deep rooted crops, such as carrots. It is also thought to improve soil drainage by breaking up compaction and hardpan on soil that has been repeatedly rototilled.



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## WHEN EARWIGS BECOME GARDEN BIGWIGS

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A bigwig is, by definition, an important person or official. The common earwig (*Forficula auricularia*) is only important when it becomes a destructive nuisance in the garden. Otherwise, we don't notice it much. Earwigs become garden bigwigs when they take over a garden, chomping down on nearly everything in their destructive path.

Neither vegetables nor flowers are immune from these pests. They are non-native. Earwigs crawled into oak shipping barrels and made their way from Europe decades ago. It is hard to love an earwig.

First, they are not pretty insects. Not like, say, a ladybug, so delightful when it lands on a finger. It is a night crawler, loving dark, damp places. It scurries about the earth, reddish brown in color like the soil in which it lives. With its bulging eyes, flat, elongated body and pincers, the thought of it crawling on your finger is, well, downright creepy.

Even its name is a tad disgusting. The earwig gets its name from the old superstition that it crawls into the ears of a sleeping person. Then, legend has it that it bores into the brain of its victim. Yuck. This kind of legend does not make for a loving relationship.

Then there is its appetite, having a preference for juicy, soft plant shoots—usually the ones that you as gardener have spent weeks carefully nurturing. When there are lots of earwigs, during

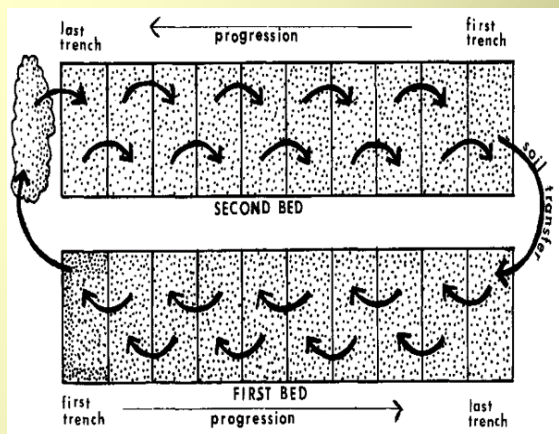
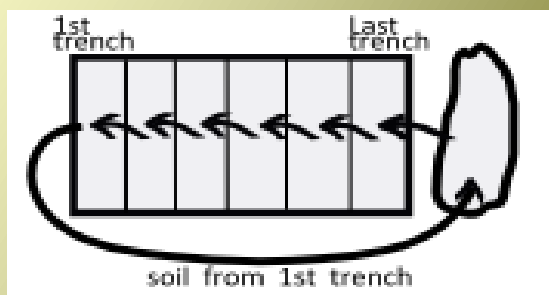


Image from New Zealand Digital Library



If you are only digging one bed, put the soil from the first trench into the hole made digging the last trench

from first trench in the second bed into the last trench in the first bed and then repeat the process across the second bed. When you reach the last trench in the second bed, put the sod and soil from the first trench. To prevent further soil compaction, stand on a solid board to do your digging.

**LASAGNA GARDENING.** No, I am not going to teach you how to grow lasagna. I am going to talk about a “no-dig” method to use to grow the vegetables you love and use to make lasagna. Lasagna gardening refers to the method of building the garden up by adding layers of organic material.

There is no need to remove existing sod and weeds. They are organic matter and contain a wealth of nutrients. You don’t have to double dig or work the soil at all. The first layer on top of the sod will be corrugated cardboard or 10+ sheets of newspaper laid directly on top of the sod or weeds in the area you have selected for your garden. Wet this layer down thoroughly to keep everything in place. The grass and weeds will quickly break down as they are smothered by the cardboard.

To make a lasagna for dinner, you carefully layer ingredients. Instead of three layers of noodles topped with three layers of sauce and cheese you alternate a layer of noodles with a layer of sauce or cheese. The same is true with a lasagna garden. It is ideal to alternate “brown layers” and “green layers”. The brown layers should be about twice as deep as the green layers but don’t get out the ruler out, just layer them. The end result of the layering process is a 50-60 cm high layered bed. It will shrink down in a few weeks.

**Green Ingredients** - grass clippings, fruit or vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea leaves and bags, weeds, well-rotted manure, compost, spent blooms, garden trimmings.

**Brown Ingredients** - leaves, shredded newspaper, peat moss.

Anything that goes into a compost pile, can go into a lasagna garden. These materials break down to provide nutrient rich crumbly soil.

As this diagram demonstrates, you start with the first trench in the first bed and remove the top soil spade depth (25-30 cm) and any sod. Pile the removed top soil and sod beside the last trench in the second bed. Using a garden fork, insert your garden fork into the subsoil to the depth of the tines and work your way around the bottom of the trench. Move to the second trench in the first bed and remove the sod. Place the sod in the bottom of the first trench, grass side down. Add any soil amendments such as manure or compost on top of the upside down sod in trench one. Remove the soil from the second trench in the first bed, again to spade depth and put the soil into the first trench. Level it out. Repeat the process around the first bed.

When you get to the end of bed one move to the second bed and put the sod and soil

a rainy summer, for instance, it is a gardener’s worst nightmare. They voraciously bite their way through lettuce, cauliflower, strawberries, celery, potatoes, plums, roses and more. Their appetite has no bounds.

It is a bug only a mother could love. Which indeed, it does. Who knew that the earwig shows maternal care? A mother earwig will guard its 20-50 cream-colored eggs, laid in underground nests during the winter months, defending them against predators. Mom earwigs will clean the eggs to protect them from fungi. They seem to care about their young.

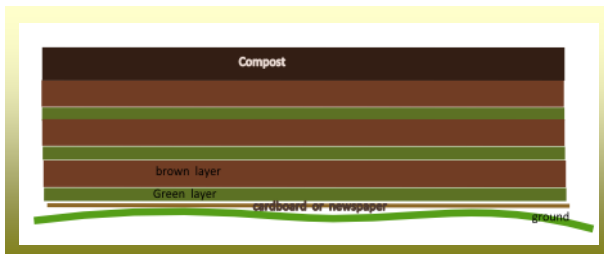
But maternal love is not enough to save the earwig from a gardener’s revenge.

The normally benign gardener will find no end of tortuous ways to kill this invader. Natural remedies are common, especially with Ontario’s pesticide ban. Home recipes abound. Some gardeners suggest punching holes in an old yogurt or margarine container, then adding a fifty-fifty combination of oil and soy sauce. Pop on the lid. Lay the stinky traps at night in the garden. Soon, the oil and soy sauce loving earwigs crawl in, drowning an oily death.

Another earwig trap is to poke a shoebox with entry holes through the base and sprinkle the insides with oatmeal or bran. (Beyond soy sauce, it appears the earwig enjoys a diet of healthy fiber too.)

Many earwig recipes involve reusing or recycling natural products. For instance, one suggestion is to roll up a newspaper (hopefully, not your spouse’s unread editorial or business page.) Slightly dampened and twisted in half, it makes a perfect den of destruction. The earwigs seek darkness in the news. In the morning light, twist from the top and destroy.

Others use an old piece watering hose. Slices several inches long are cut and placed in the garden. In the morning, the wiggling contents are dumped into a bucket of hot water and detergent. Voila, death by the soapy suds (at



Create the lasagna garden at any time of year. Fall is the optimum time as there is an abundance of organic material such as fallen leaves and general yard waste. The lasagna garden can sit and break down over the winter and will be ready to plant

in the spring. Fall rain and winter snow keep the materials in your garden moist and speed breakdown. Starting in the spring or summer, requires more “soil-like” amendments, especially finished compost so you can plant right away. Layer as many greens and browns with layers of finished compost in between. Finish off the entire bed with 8-10 cm of finished compost and then plant.

Plant your other garden as you would any other. When you dig down, if you hit your cardboard, you may have to cut holes in it. To maintain the garden, add mulch to the top of the bed in the form of straw, grass clippings or chopped leaves. Once established, care for your garden the same way you would care for any other. If using a “Square Foot Garden” approach (see The Edible Garden April 2015), you will need to top up your bed with more compost.

least, a clean death).

Gardeners should reflect on the fact that, in less stressful times, the earwig can also be a beneficial insect. It is an omnivore, eating insect larvae, snails, aphids and other bugs. They are a food for birds- another reason to attract birds to the garden. Birds eat the earwigs that eat your plants. Earwigs don't bite or harm humans, just plants.

It seems it is balance that is important with earwigs. When the balance tips and there are too many, the insect becomes a destructive pest. Then the gentle gardener becomes a tad unbalanced, drowning, stomping and squishing this insect that nobody loves.

## COMPARISON OF DOUBLE DIGGING AND LASAGNA GARDENING

Factors	Double Digging	Lasagna Garden
Exercise	😊 Good	😊 Easy and fun
Soil	😞 Aerates temporarily 😞 Rocks easily removed 😞 Compost added 25 cm below 😞 Disrupts soil structure and microorganisms	😊 Improves—loose and crumbly - its all in the compost 😊 Rocks are not a problem 😊 Compost generously added in process 😊 Soil structure not disturbed,
Work Level	😞 Back breaking	
Weeds	😞 Brings weed seed to surface	😊 Fewer-Newspaper suppresses from below, mulch protects from above
Water	No change	😊 Compost holds water well
Fertilizer	Required	😊 Less or none. Garden all compost
Ongoing Maintenance	😞 More weeds	😊 Less weeds, less need to water
Organic Matter		😞 Need a lot of organic matter to start
Subsoil Inhabitants	😞 Disrupts earthworms, beetles, micro-organisms	😊 Compost attracts, micro-organisms earthworms and beneficial insects

Few scientific research studies have been conducted so these benefits and risks are largely anecdotal.

Perhaps it is this lazy author's approach but I agree with “Mulch Queen” Ruth Stout that building up rather than digging down is the best way to go!

Watch for *Trowel Talk* the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton electronic monthly gardening newsletter available on the 15th at <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca/>

Visit the Almonte online community newspaper 'The Millstone' - <http://millstonenews.com/> - for a column by David Hinks of the Ottawa Carleton Master Gardeners; under the Gardening tab

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton and Master Gardeners of Lanark County are member groups of Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc., a registered charity with the mission of providing gardening advice to homeowners. The Edible Garden logo was created by Jon Last (jonlast13@rogers.com)

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