

Create the Beds

Some garden beds can be quite large and a lot of work to create. There are different ways to create a bed depending on the amount of work you want to do and your time to get it done. Below are two different ways to remove the sod to create a bed:

1. Dig up existing grass

Digging out the grass can be hard work. Use a shovel to remove a section of grass from the center of your planned bed, then continue to remove turf (grass) by wedging the shovel (a hoe also works) under the edges of the grass. Then lift and peel the sod away. Once you have removed the grass, you can prepare the soil for planting.

When clearing vegetation by hand, remove as little soil as possible; the top few inches of soil is the most fertile. As you start removing the first chunks of existing vegetation, examine the soil beneath. You shouldn't see any grass rhizomes, plant roots, or rooted stems. If you do, dig a little deeper and remove more soil.

2. Make a flower bed without digging

Method 1: *Smothering* is the lengthy-but-easy method. Simply cover the entire area of your future flower bed with several overlapping sheets of newspaper. Layer the paper at least six pages deep, then cover the newspaper with several inches of rich soil or compost. Water well. Over the next few months, the buried grass will die, and the newspaper will decompose while adding nutrients to the soil. For best results, keep the area covered for up to a year before planting.

Method 2: *Solarization* is an excellent choice for a heavily weed-infested site. With solarization, you harness the sun's energy to bake the soil above 140°F to kill weed seeds, insect eggs, disease spores, and nematodes. Cut down weeds and till up roots. Rake weeds and stems and rake a second time to even out the soil. Water the area thoroughly to soak the top 4–6 inches of soil. Cover the soil with a sheet of clear construction-grade plastic (1–6 mil), stretching it tightly. Seal any seams with clear tape to trap heat generated beneath the plastic. Use heavy blocks or bricks to hold down the edges until you can bury them to anchor the plastic and retain heat. In four to six weeks, the soil will be sufficiently heated and you can plant.

Note: In the Northern Hemisphere, the best time to solarize the soil is when the sun is at its highest point in the sky: June and July. This method works best in a garden site that receives at least six hours of direct sun daily.

Once the turf has been removed, outline the area with some landscape edging made of plastic, stone, brick, or wood.