



# How to Establish A Garden for Birds

## A Step-by-Step Guide

Gardening is an enriching activity that can support birds by offering places to forage for food, nesting habitat, and safe places to take refuge. Creating a new garden is a rewarding and exciting experience. When transforming a lawn into a flourishing garden space, there are options for how to get started. This guide covers three practical ways to jumpstart your gardening journey or ideas about expanding your pre-existing garden space.

### Plant Direct

Direct planting involves obtaining your plants and inserting them directly into the ground. This technique is very cost-effective and low maintenance after the work is done!

#### Step-by-Step Guide

1. Choose a location that works best for you and your plant's needs.
2. Dig appropriately sized holes based on your plant, place your plants inside and backfill the hole with your appropriate soil type or organic material like compost, peat moss or nutrient dense soil if you feel your soil lacks nutrients.
  - Don't forget to leave space between your plants to prevent crowding!
3. Gently press down on the region around your plant to remove air pockets and for soil stabilization.
4. Water your new plants once they are in place. After the initial watering, only water again if the soil dries out in the first month of establishment. Otherwise, rainfall will be sufficient!

Before



After



Photo by Paula Osborn, Colorado

### Sheet Mulch

Also commonly known as *lasagna mulching*, it refers to the process of adding several layers of nitrogen-rich organic material on top of your grassy region to create a healthy foundation for your garden. This process is great for improving soil fertility, suppressing weeds, and lessening garden maintenance. If you feel your lawn is already nutrient rich, a different approach may be better suited for your lawn!

#### Step-by-Step Guide

1. Outline your chosen area with flags or another indicator.
2. Water your lawn until the soil is moist.
3. Place a thick layer of cardboard that is not waxed or colored on top of the grass. Water the cardboard thoroughly.
4. Add a substantial layer of organic materials such as manure, compost, chopped leaves, wood chips, or straw on top on your cardboard layer. This layer should be greater than 12 inches.
5. Place a 2-3-inch layer of seedless, undyed, mulch on top.
6. Allow this to sit for 4-6 weeks and you are ready to get planting!

Before



After



Photo by Karen Carson, Maine

### Lawn (Sod) Removal

Involves detaching your grass or sod from the ground to efficiently prepare your lawn to become a nourishing base for your impending garden!

#### Step-by-Step Guide

1. Outline the area you want to remove grass/sod from with flags or some kind of marker.
2. Water your grass to create moisture. Then, cut/stab strips of the sod/grass based the length of the area you are excavating using a shovel blade.
3. Lift the edge of the strip by wedging your shovel underneath the grass and prying it backward.
4. If you are removing grass, you can sever the grass roots by pushing the shovel parallel to the under region of the grass and sliding it back and forth to slice it.
5. Repeat this process until the entire pad of grass/sod is no longer connected to the ground and you can remove it! You can also amend the soil with some organic matter and now it's ready to add plants!
6. If there is space around the new plants, a 2-3-inch application of undyed mulch may prevent weed seeds from germinating.

Before



After



Photo by Marian Pempel, New York

### Pro Tips

- Prepare your site in the fall for quick planting in the spring.
- Shrubs and trees establish better in the fall because the soil is warm.
- Water new plantings for a week or two to help the roots establish.
- If you decided to remove sod pads, you could reuse them by filling in low spots in your yard, repurposing them as garden dividers, or composting them.
- Tilling can be an effective method of breaking down harder soil clumps to loosen your soil before planting. Tilling, however, can result in increased weed pressure, so you may want to till multiple times to ensure weed seeds have been eliminated.
- If your region is known to have issues with curious critters and deer, consider placing fencing around your plants.

Before



After



Photo by Kris Monahan, Missouri