



How To Dig Over Your Plot

Digging over an allotment plot is one of the most important undertakings of any allotment gardener, who wishes to keep their plot in top condition, particularly if they want to keep their plot organic. This activity should take place in every production area once every season, starting when the last crops have been lifted, and if possible finished in time for Christmas, so the frost can help break down the clumps of soil for spring.

In recent years some allotment ploholders have opted for the no-dig system with lots of raised beds, which doesn't require digging over, but rather a forking in of mulch and/or green manure.

For those who still believe in digging over their plot, and add lots of organic matter to help improve their soil and encourage worms and micro organisms to work their magic on their plot – this is a guide to the most commonly used techniques.

Before you get started.

There's no doubt about it – digging is hard work – so it's important that you know your limits (particularly in the beginning). To make it more of an enjoyable job, it's better to break the whole job down into small bits, and do one at a time.

Make sure that your tools are in good condition. You'll make the job an awful lot harder on yourself if your spade isn't clean, just as you would if you tried to cut a slice of bread with a blunt knife.

Tools you'll need:

- Spade
- Fork
- Wheelbarrow

Organic matter

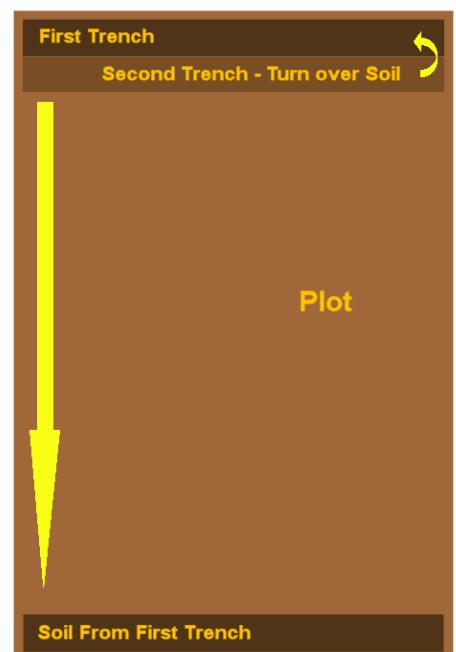
- Farmyard manure
- Compost from your compost heap

Setting out.

Once you've marked out the part of your plot you're going to dig over, start at one end by digging a trench. Your trench should be one spade deep, and around 1ft wide.

Transport the soil you dig out to the opposite end of the area you're digging out. Once you've dug your way through to the other end this soil will cover your last trench.

If you're single digging your trench should be one spit (1ft) deep, and if you're double digging your trench should be 2 spits (2ft) deep. You'll learn more about the different digging techniques on the next page.





Digging Techniques

There's a few different digging techniques you can make use of when you dig over your plot, all of which is basically variations of the three techniques outlined below. What you should aim to do would be to single dig all production areas once every season, and if possible you should try and do double digging once every 2-3 seasons.

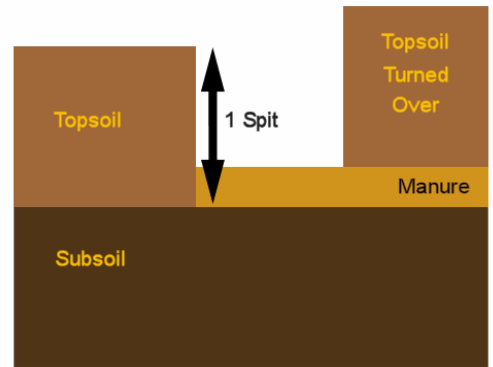
Single Digging.

Single digging is the easiest and most widely used of the three methods, and sufficient for most allotment plots where regular production have taken place, and the soil quality is reasonably good.

Your trench should be one spit (around 1ft) deep. Dig your first trench as described before. Make sure you dig out all the soil from the bottom of the trench, and loosen the soil at the bottom with a fork.

Backfill the trench with manure so it's about half full, take a step back, and dig a new trench behind it, turning the soil you dig out onto the top of the manure.

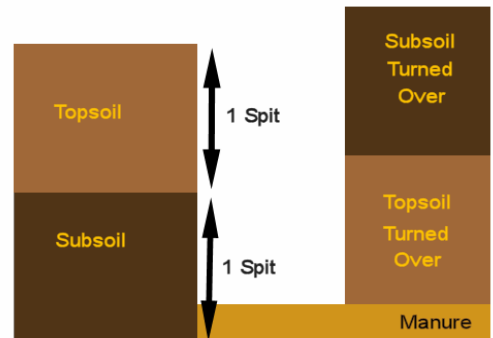
Continue this process until you reach the end of the bed you're digging, and backfill the trench with the soil you dug out to make the first trench.



Double Digging.

When you're double digging you pretty much do the same as with single digging, only you dig your trenches 2 spits (2ft) deep, rather than one.

The reason why it's beneficial to do this is that you break up the sub-soil, the soil layer under the top-soil, which in time ensures better drainage, and an improved soil structure to a greater depth. This is particularly beneficial for growing root crops.



Double Digging Cheat.

If you're not up for the backbreaking task of double digging, but still want to achieve some of the great benefits it brings, the double digging cheat method is for you.

With this method you dig your trench one spit deep, as with single digging, but in stead of only half filling your trench with manure, you fill it completely, before turning the next trench over on top.

This method will, over time, give you the same result with less work. However, you'll need access to huge amounts of manure/organic matter.

