

# Put tomatoes where the grass grows

It's easy to turf the grass for a veggie patch, writes **Michael Green.**

UNDER stage 3a water restrictions, we're banned from watering lawns from the mains. So avoid the dead grass this summer, suggests Adam Grubb from Very Edible Gardens, and convert it "from lawn to lunch".

You can build a "no-dig" garden without any back-breaking work by layering brown organic matter (such as pea straw or autumn leaves) and manure (cow, sheep or horse) to form a raised bed.

"It's like creating a compost where you're going to grow your veggies," Mr Grubb says. "No-dig gardens are really well-suited over lawn or weeds, or where the soil is poor."

Begin by spreading chicken manure or blood and bone over the designated area, then set down wet newspaper to stifle the grass below. Next, layer the manure and organic material to at least 40 centimetres. "It's sometimes called lasagne gardening because you alternate those two layer types as you go up," he says.

To plant your vegetables, make small holes and fill them with compost or rich topsoil. Place seedlings into the soil, rather than the manure.

Leafy greens will thrive in no-dig gardens straightaway, but peas, beans and root vegetables like carrots and onions can find the manure too rich for the first few months. "You've given your garden such a boost that you won't need to fertilise for 12 months," Mr Grubb says. "Its performance will improve in the second year."

Very Edible Gardens can help you get

growing. They provide materials, know-how and permaculture design services (fully installed raised veggie beds start at \$750). See their website (below) for a more detailed guide to no-dig gardening.

Matthew Pember, from the Little Veggie Patch Company, also offers backyard food-growing expertise, from advice through to garden installation and maintenance. "You can grow almost anything in springtime," he says. "But it's important to plant what you are going to eat. It defeats the whole purpose if you don't eat them!"

Delicious home-grown tomatoes are at the top of the list. Mr Pember's favourite variety is black Russian. "They're really tasty to pick off the vine and eat with a pinch of salt," he says.

You should propagate seeds now, but if you want to plant as seedlings, hold off until early November. "The rule of thumb is to plant tomato seedlings over the Cup weekend," he says. "Make sure to water regularly and deeply while the plants develop."

Grow basil, chilli, oregano and thyme as well, and you'll be able to bottle a delicious tomato sauce when you harvest in late summer and autumn.

If you strike pests or other problems and decide to search the internet for advice, remember to stick to southern hemisphere pages that match your climate.

In any case, Mr Pember says, the best wisdom is usually close at hand.

"I live in Thornbury and I've got lots of Greek and Italian neighbours. They're a wealth of information and they're always happy to share what they know," he says. "Learn from the people who've been doing it for years."

[veryediblegardens.com](http://veryediblegardens.com),  
[thelittleveggiepatchcompany.com](http://thelittleveggiepatchcompany.com).



NO DIG, NO MOW, NO WORRIES. Robin Cowcher