

Breaking new ground

F and **w** and prepare the soil for spring planting. If your chosen garden site currently looks like a jungle of weeds, remember to pace yourself and start small. This is your chance to get rid of many perennial weeds, making later weeding much easier. This step is the most physically demanding of all the vegetable gardening chores. Remember, many hands make lighter work!

To start clearing a plot, first cut down surface vegetation. This can be done with a mower, gas-powered trimmer (metal blade preferred), or by hand with a scythe. Rake off the cut vegetation and pile it in your composting area.

Use stakes and string to mark out the perimeter of

Keep in mind that removing the cut sod results in a loss of organic matter from the site. Plan to return some organic matter in the form of composted sods or other compost or topsoil before planting.

Another approach to getting rid of sod is to cover the area after mowing. Depriving plants of light and moisture will kill or at least weaken them. A sheet of opaque, heavy plastic works well (try damp-proof membrane from the hardware store or silage plastic from a farm supply store). Make sure the material is weighed down; otherwise a strong wind can wreak havoc. The plastic will have

to stay in place for up to three months during warm weather to be effective. Once the vegetation is dead, you can start spading the area as described above.

F After working the soil, take a sample and have it analyzed for nutrients and pH

. Some amendments, such as lime and slow-release nutrient sources are also best applied in the fall.

AGRICULTURE EXTENDED LEARNING GARDEN BOX

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