



Weedless Gardening

Lee Reich, Michael A. Hill (Illustrator)

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Conventional wisdom says to garden from the bottom up, turning over the soil every spring until your back aches. Ironically, this does such a good job aerating that gardeners spend the rest of the season pulling weeds and replacing the suddenly energized (and easily used up) nutrients. Mother nature, on the other hand, gardens from the top down-layering undisturbed soil with leaves and other organic materials. In following this example and synthesizing the work of other perceptive gardeners, Lee Reich presents a compelling new system called weedless gardening.

The Weedless Garden is good for plants and it's good for people. It protects the soil, contributes to plant health, reduces water needs, cuts down on a gardener's labor, encourages earthworms and, of course, mitigates weed problems by keeping the seeds dormant. Four basic tenets form the system's backbone-minimize soil disruption; protect soil surface; avoid soil compaction; use drip irrigation-and the way to get there is simple. For a new bed or established garden, layering is key, and the perfect material to use is also among the most common-newspaper. Add organic mulch and compost on top, and plants are growing in rich, self-generating humus. From vegetable gardening to flower gardens to planting trees, shrubs, and vines, *The Weedless Garden* works everywhere-allowing the gardener to work quite a bit less.

Weedless Gardening Details

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John says

This was a very interesting gardening book. It presents an alternative to what most gardeners do. Especially what I was taught by my grandfather. However, the evidence for these methods is anecdotal. There are no rigorous studies to actually see if this method really results in less weeds than other methods. I tried this method in my own garden this year. Even though I didn't count the number of weeds, it didn't seem that there were less this year as the prior years. The experiment is really about how many weed seeds are already in the garden soil and how many blow in from somewhere else. Weedless gardening is much easier than what people usually do. Even if there is no difference in the number of weeds. As long as the soil fertility is the same as the other methods, then this method is better.

Josh says

Probably better used as a reference book.

A few of the main takeaways are:

- You should almost never till or disturb the soil. If you are going to till the ground, it should be because you're starting your new garden and need to completely destroy what's growing there currently.
- You shouldn't be tilling, because you should be constantly (realistically seasonally and as needed in the summer) adding rich compost to the surface. Over time this will create a much healthier layer of dirt on the surface, which is better than constantly trying to pull nutrients from deeper levels of soil.
- You also shouldn't be stepping on the ground in your garden. Similar to the reason you shouldn't till your garden which is related to how you're creating less desirable conditions below ground (related to water and nutrient absorption and affecting how roots are able to grow). So, you should instead plan your garden ahead of time and make intentional pathways that aren't growing anything.
- Try to maximize your available space. This was primarily related to plants having different growing seasons and durations, and taking advantage of these differences to maximize the yield from your garden.

So, if you need a reference on setting up your garden, check this out.

Dan Moore says

I came across Lee Reich's book a few years ago in our local library. Since I was knee deep in weeds at the time the title intrigued me. At the time it was mid summer and my garden, as usual, was an example of spring time work gone awry.

Each year, I diligently tilled and rowed my garden as my father and his father had done, arranged the sprinklers, planted the best plants, staked the beans, caged the tomatoes and planned how this year I was going to have a TV worthy garden. Then May turned to June, to July and 98 degrees and 98% humidity stopped my outdoor adventures. I only went to the garden to harvest the results, which were rapidly disappearing under a malaise of weeds, bugs, and diseases. So once again by summer time the garden had become an unsightly eye sore rather than the picture of pride I had foolishly envisioned while reading over

the seed catalogue. If only I didn't have a real job, and kids, and a to do list a mile long, I could spend my days toiling away in the garden to get one of those "fake" TV gardens that obviously cannot be produced by mere mortals.

After skimming through the book I began to get excited. I really didn't expect much from the book but the concepts made a certain sense and if they worked, maybe I could actually improve my garden.

Three years into this experiment, I can say that I look forward to gardening more now than ever. What used to be a chore is now a pleasant break from my routine and a source of pride to visitors. While no garden is truly weedless, it is much easier to stay ahead of the weeds using Lee's approach. It also fits much better into the rest of what I do. I used to have to figure out where to get rid of the grass clippings all year, and the mulch/chips from tree removal and land clearing. Now, my 1000 square foot garden consumes as much material as I can throw at it. My grass, my neighbors grass, my mothers grass, leaves, kitchen scraps, etc, most of which people are glad to have a place to dump, all go into my garden.

I have not followed all the recommendations of Mr. Reich. I'm currently experimenting with composting in my overly large walkways (48 inch) rather than composting in a separate compost bin. It cuts my yield but pleases the wife since there is no large ugly bin in the yard, and no turning of the compost. (My chickens turn it for me, while adding their own brand of nitrogen.)

As with most garden books, the first half is dedicated to the topic at hand, the second half is a glossary of gardening topics, plants, tools, techniques which are common to most any gardening book. This is often viewed as a "filler" in many books, a way to justify the price for the now larger book. This book has many such items in its second half but all that I have read are specific to the no till, weedless method and are not simply added ad hoc from another source for filler.

Maria Jansson says

Good thoughts. Nothing revolutionary, but a receipt that I am on the right path with my garden.

Ellen Bell says

I found this book to be thoroughly aggravating for some reason. Maybe because I'm just one of those gardening fools that likes to till my soil? Not sure... If nothing else, I'd say that it was an awfully long book to make a pretty simple point. The author could have summed it up more succinctly like this: Don't till your soil, don't step on your soil, apply mulch. 'Nuf said.

Sue says

A winner. I have implemented several of Lee's (and other author's - Ruth Stout for one) ideas. Mulching and feeding your gardens (vegetable, perennial beds, etc) from the top down to improve your soil works. I started with what I considered concrete with some wild grass on top. After about a years time, I am already able to dig into the earth with a shovel about 6-8". Many followers of this method report the same and it only gets better with time. I'm selling my rototiller.

Eric says

Weedless Gardening is an excellent organic gardening resource, full of useful advice, informative tables, and additional resources. While I continue to not see a viable path between the current state of my garden and a weedless one that requires a few minutes of weeding a week, I can also dream, and at least I'll have good tips along the way!

Janelle says

Great book, until Lee told me to use Round-Up. That chapter was like finding my new friend was a KKK leader.

Chrissy Peterson says

a well done book with some great ideas for easier gardening. I will implement some of these ideas this year and see how it goes.

Sarah Evan says

SO GOOD.

For a novice gardener, this book helps explain where weeds come from and how to avoid having them. It's really common sense stuff a lot of people know, but I did not! Also, it's the basics of composting and soil quality in making yourself a weedless garden, so it's great to get those basics under your belt as well.

I wish everyone read this book before buying posion to get rid of weeds!

Robin Ripley says

This is one of the best books I have read on garden maintenance. I would include it in my top five gardening books to recommend to beginners.

Margaret says

Great information on no-till gardening.

Celest says

I think this is a handy guide for gardening, it is easy to read with clear and consistent instruction on the methods used. I dislike the drawings to illustrate a "fact" presented, when a photo would demonstrate the real information. I will definitely consider the method and apply some of this style in my own yard.

Richard says

An interesting and fast read. Mr. Reich's approach seems logical from a scientific viewpoint. I will apply his gardening methods this spring because I've been loosening soil in plant beds for years followed by an application of shredded bark - the result of which has been anything but weedless. Disturbing the soil surface as little as is practical, addition of only 1" of organic mulch per year, and drip irrigation delivered only to plants that are welcome in the garden are the three factors I'll focus on. If Mr. Reich's approach works, I would look forward with joy to virtual elimination of the use of herbicides in my gardens since herbicides are expensive, time consuming to mix and apply, and without doubt less than beneficial to all living things.

Erin Caldwell says

Although the concept is interesting, I was pretty disappointed that Reich didn't go into very much detail in this book. My husband asked me several questions while I was reading it that didn't get answered: How do you actually plant seeds, especially seeds like radishes and lettuce that are microscopic, using this technique? How often do you have to reapply newspapers? In addition, I felt that Reich kept mentioning that you might have to do some "maintenance weeding" at several different points during the text.

It was an interesting book and I will definitely try some of his techniques, but I don't think it was thorough enough for me to truly abandon what I'm doing and try going weedless. I also was a little annoyed that he delved into things like companion gardening, growing the best fruits and vegetables, and planting a wildflower meadow. Those concepts should not be sidenotes in a weedless gardening book - I have already read full texts about many of those ideas and want more information on those I haven't, not a chapter in another book. The subject I did want him to expand on - weedless gardening - was somewhat vague.
