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Annual Bed Preparation

In this video I'll go over the seasonal steps for keeping garden soil healthy, and how to re-work the beds each spring.

This section is for those who have already double dug their beds and are just doing annual upkeep. If you haven't double dug the bed first, and it's a new bed, then the following process isn't as practical. *see the section on double digging a bed.

First, use a broad fork, if you have one, or use a garden fork to loosen the top foot of soil. Remove large weeds or unwanted plants, and put that material in the compost pile. If a large cover crop is in place, harvest it and compost. If small cover crop in place, turn it into the soil. Then use a garden fork to break up clods in entire bed. You can lift any clods and slap them with the back of the fork. This is usually enough to break up most of the larger clods. Level and rake the bed before adding amendments. Remove stones and take any extra vegetable matter to the compost.

Water the bed, if extra dry, and let it dry for a few hours, or overnight depending on how tacky the soil is. Higher clay content soil takes a bit longer to dry out to the point it can be worked.

Collect your compost for the bed. This should be added every growing season. And sometimes mid season. Add **sifted compost** at rate of 6-10 buckets per 100sq' bed, or about a 1-2 inch layer. This can amount to 4-12 cubic feet per 100sq' bed depending on availability and prior soil conditions. You really can't over do it on compost. You can amend your soil up to 50% compost if you really have the supply. But a couple inches on each bed per growing season should be adequate.

If you don't have your own compost, buy it by the truckload or bag, but make sure the contents are organic.
*See the section on choosing store bought compost for more information.

-Add rock flours once every five years or so.
*See soil intro section on the importance of rock flour.

Rock Flour:

-**Rock Phosphate** provides phosphorus for healthy leaf growth. Apply at 10 pounds per 100 sq feet when you start a garden.

-**Greensand / or Granite Dust** provides potassium and trace elements. Apply at 10 pounds per 100 sq feet when you start a garden initially.

Try to broadcast the dust carefully, low to the bed and not during windy conditions. The powders can be very fine and will blow away easily until they are mixed in.

Once all the amendments are added to the worked bed, you will need to turn them in with a twisting move of the garden fork. The reason you don't just rake them in is that raking the material can cause it to build up in rows and not be evenly distributed. It can be done with a rake, but more in a chopping motion than a raking motion. The key is to preserve the even distribution of amendments on the bed.To perform the fork twist, just take the fork handle with the right hand and spin it in the soil at a slight angle about a half turn, using the left hand to guide it if the one handed technique proves difficult.

Once the bed has been fully prepped, you should optimally plant right away, either with direct seeding or transplants. This gives you the best head start on getting your plants established ahead of weeds.

The next step is creating planting spaces or furrows depending on what you are planting. To maximize the number of plants in a bed, you would use a triangle pattern at the center spacing for the various plants. But with drip lines, in general, it's much easier to create the intensive spacing with rows that are spaced at the same distance apart as the plant spacing requirement. So if a plant like Swiss Chard was going to be planted at 8" centers, you would make rows with a1"x 1" board or hoe 8" apart as far along as you wanted to plant them.

It's best to setup the drip system at this point so you don't disturb the seeds or transplants later on. *see section on Setting up Drip Irrigation.

Measure out your drip lines accordingly and cut them to proper lengths. It's also a good idea to test them for leaks once setup to fix anything first before planting. Once drip lines are in place, pull them back for the planting process.
Then you simply sow the seed or seedling 8" apart along that furrowed row. The drip lines are then dropped into place.

Water new seeds or seedlings right away. You may need to supplement the drip fed irrigation using a spray wand on the hose at first until the seedlings get stabilized, then the drip system will be sufficient most of the time.

Once plants are established, and depending on variety and planting arrangement, mulching around the plants will help conserve water in the soil. Just add an inch or two around the plants to keep the soil covered until the living mulch of the plant canopy can add to the protection. Try to keep deep mulch away from actual stem of the plants by an inch or two.
*See section on mulch.