

Recycling an old idea

By Zelpha Boyd, Gallatin Empire Garden Club Member

A few years ago I came across an innovative way to start a new flower bed or vegetable garden—Lasagna Gardening. It's a “no tilling, no digging, no weeding, no kidding” method of gaining gardenable space—without the hard work of digging out boulders, imbedded quack grass and weeds, or turning over sod.

The idea of heavy mulching has been used for many years as a way of deterring weeds. In her book, How to have a Green Thumb without an Aching Back, (printed in 1968!) Ruth Stout promotes the idea of year around mulching. Leaving the ground unprotected and exposed to the elements was not her way of gardening.

(Disclaimer: Ms. Stout lived and gardened in Connecticut where conditions are much more suitable to this type of gardening.

Leaving a year round mulch works well in damp, warmer climates. In Montana, mulching in summer keeps the soil moist and saves water. But pulling back those materials in the spring allows the soil to warm more quickly.)

But I digress. Patricia Lanza has written a book, Lasagna Gardening, in which she explains the principles of an easy way of starting a new garden.

Lanza's method calls for building layers of organic material—much the same as building a compost pile but spread over the entire area—where a new garden is desired. First a thick layer of newspapers are laid out. This insures that the weeds and grass are smothered. Using any materials available—green, brown, garden stalks, compost, grass clippings, manure,

soil—lay them down in layers to a depth of a foot or more. The resulting lasagna bed is watered down and kept damp. Allow time for the material to compost down into plantable garden soil.

While living in Harrison, I successfully followed the steps she prescribes and made a new bed over what had been quack grass. The first year, on that newly layered area, I planted beans, peas and corn—large seeds—that could grow in the loose material. The second year carrots and beets took hold very nicely.

I've always wanted an English Garden. When I moved into my new home in Bozeman, the space was just right—except for the lawn areas. The lasagna composting method provided the way to eliminate the grass with very little work. Using what materials I had on hand, and buying some manure and garden soil, I made a bed about six inches deep. A grass-free garden is becoming a reality.

This spring I'll sprinkle flower seeds over the area. The roots of these plants will penetrate the composted material—and hopefully some of the newspaper underneath—making the area ready for the perennials of an English Garden.

Next summer there'll be flowers galore without my having had to turn a single clump of sod! Please stop by when you're in the area and see how we're doing. The address is 411 N. Ida, just a couple blocks east of N. Rouse in Bozeman.