

SITE PREPARATION METHODS

There are a number of ways to remove turf grass and prepare a site for native plants. This document lists some of the methods and some pros/cons of each option. Remove any persistent perennial weeds prior to starting these methods, as these methods may not work on them, and they will be much more difficult to remove after planting your native plants.



SHEET MULCHING/SMOTHERING

How it works: Cardboard/newspaper laid over existing vegetation then a layer of mulch (3–4 inches). Kill grass or mow on lowest setting first.

Pros: Can plant native plant plugs right into the mulch. Good weed suppression. Limited soil disturbance that could expose weed seeds.

Cons: Impractical if planting a very large area. Cardboard can be impermeable to water and gas impacting soil microbial life.

Example timeline:

- Option 1: Sheet mulch fall. Plant plugs in May/June.
- Option 2: Sheet mulch summer. Plant plugs in September.
- Option 3: Sheet mulch (anytime) and plant plugs right away. Monitor and pull grass that comes up through planting holes.



SOLARIZATION

How it works: Black or clear plastic placed over the soil – heat of the sun kills existing vegetation. Remove plastic prior to planting. Option to add mulch after grass is dead.

Pros: Low effort, no soil disturbance.

Cons: Takes 3 to 6 weeks, produces plastic waste, and may kill soil microbial life.

Example timeline:

- Option 1: Lay down plastic in April. Remove in mid-June and plant native plant plugs.
- Option 2: Lay down plastic in July. Remove in September and plant native plant plugs.
- Option 3: Lay down plastic in August. Remove in October/November, use a rake to rough up the surface and sow native seeds in the disturbed areas.



SOD CUTTER

How it works: Physically cuts grass and top layer of soil for manual removal.

Pros: Site can be prepped within a day.

Cons: Labor intensive, creates exhaust, and exposes weed seeds. Results in sod you will need to rehome or dispose of. Rental cost.

Example timeline:

- Option 1: Remove sod in the spring (May/June) or fall (September) and plant native plant plugs right away. Mulching can help suppress weeds.
- Option 2: Follow the steps in option 1 but leave the ground exposed to give weed seeds a chance to germinate first. Then dig them out or use an herbicide before planting your plugs.
- Option 2: Remove sod in the fall (October) and sow native seeds on exposed soil/snow sometime October-March.



GLYPHOSATE HERBICIDE

How it works: Targets leaves, stems and roots by inhibiting amino-acid production. Soil microorganisms break it down into phosphorus and amino acids.

Pros: Cost-effective, no soil disturbance, low effort.

Cons: Must spray in correct weather conditions and avoid using near bodies of water. Takes 2+ weeks for existing vegetation to die. May take multiple applications. Potential for negative human and environmental impacts.

Example timeline:

- Option 1: Spray in spring, wait 2-3 weeks, then either mulch and plant native plugs into mulch or plant directly into dead grass.
- Option 2: Spray in the fall, wait 2-3 weeks then either plant native plant plugs in September or use a rake to rough up the surface and sow native seeds in the disturbed areas in November.

Rototilling is not recommended. For sites infested with quack grass, Canada thistle, and bindweed; rototilling multiplies and spreads their sprouts over the site. Rototilling also breaks up beneficial microbial, bacterial, and fungal soil colonies.