



**GROUND MAINTENANCE AND FLORAL DISPLAY
CONTRACT
WITHIN
MALDON TOWN COUNCIL
FOR THE PERIOD
1 April 2022 TO 31 MARCH 2025**

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS
SPECIFICATION OF WORKS**

GROUND MAINTENANCE AND FLORAL DISPLAY CONTRACT GENERAL REQUIREMENTS AND SPECIFICATION OF WORKS 2022-2025

1. GLOSSARY

Biodiversity - the variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat, a high level of which is usually considered to be important and desirable.

Fungicide – a chemical used to destroy fungus.

Herbicide - a substance that is toxic to plants, used to destroy unwanted vegetation.

Manual weeding – to manage weed populations through physical methods that remove, injure, kill, or make the growing conditions unfavourable.

Mulch - is a layer of organic material applied to the surface of soil to conserve moisture, improve the health and fertility of the soil, reduce weed growth and enhancing the visual appeal of the area.

No-dig – the avoidance of digging to minimise disturbance to the soil to encourage beneficial organisms and microbes and the application of an annual layer of mulch to feed the soil.

Organic - relating to or derived from living matter.

Organic Based Fertiliser - a fertiliser that is derived from animal or vegetable matter to improve soil fertility and plant growth. Examples are fish blood and bone, bonemeal, manure, seaweed extract, nettle and comfrey tea.

Pesticide - a substance used for destroying insects or other organisms harmful to cultivated plants or to animals.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Town Council own and manage a number of sites and is committed to maintaining them to a high standard for the benefit of the residents and visitors. The specification includes details of the number of expected maintenance visits throughout the year as a minimum but may request additional visits depending on the weather.

2.2 The Town Council is working toward achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and it is a requirement of our Contractors to do the same. Examples of practices we will require the Contractors to work to, but not limited to include:

- 2.2.1 no-dig gardening – on established areas digging or tilling to prepare the soil is limited and the application of peat free organic matter to be applied annually. (See appendix B)
- 2.2.2 the use of pesticides is forbidden
- 2.2.3 the use of herbicides and fungicides must only be used if manual removal or weeds has proved unsuccessful, a written request has been submitted to the Town Council providing details as to why the use of such products is deemed necessary and what weed removal methods have been used prior to the request being submitted. The use of such products must only be used once written approval is obtained from the Town Council.
- 2.2.3 Use of organic based fertilisers

2.3 The tenderer should visit the sites to assess the work required, to view the topography and layout of the areas, before a tender is submitted.

3. SITES

The sites in this contract are:

1. All Saints Churchyard – High St, Maldon CM9 4QE
2. St Mary's Churchyard - St Mary's Lane, Maldon CM9 5JB
3. St Peters Churchyard - High St, Maldon CM9 4QE
4. Market Hill Garden – Market Hill, Maldon CM9 4PZ
5. Leech Memorial Garden – Lodge Road, Maldon CM9 6HW
6. St Giles Ruins – Spital Road, Maldon CM9 6EA
7. Maldon Hall Allotments – St Giles Crescent, Maldon CM9 6HS
8. Warwick Crescent Allotments – off King St, Maldon CM9 5DX
9. Brickhouse Farm Allotments – Poulton Close, Maldon CM9 6NG
10. Various open spaces with the Town boundary – as per map

4. WORKS TO BE CARRIED OUT

4.1 The required work is fully described in the schedule of works and specification of work.

4.2 All works should be carried out in accordance with the principles and practices of accepted and recognised horticultural standards.

4.3 The Contractor shall ensure that the Council's property is protected against accidental or negligent damage likely to be caused through undertaking the works specified.

4.4 Any damage caused by the Contractor will be immediately made safe and repaired to the satisfaction of the Council at the Contractor's expense.

4.5 Any suggested works relating to tree works shall be referred to the Environment Officer.

5. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

5.1 The Contractor should carry out all work having regard to the principles and spirit of Local Agenda 21 in relation to cutting pollution, reducing waste, saving energy, protecting the environment, and working in a sustainable manner. Contractors are to provide proof of working practices.

5.2 GOOD PRACTICE: where and to the extent that materials and workmanship are not fully specified they are to be:

5.2.1 Suitable for the purposes of the works stated or reasonably to be inferred from the Contract Documents; and

5.2.2 In accordance with good horticultural practice.

5.3 MANUFACTURER'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.3.1 Handle, store, prepare, and supply each product in accordance with manufacturer's printed or written recommendations/instructions. Inform Maldon Town Council if this should conflict with any other specified requirement.

5.3.2 Submit copies to the Maldon Town Council when requested.

5.4 PROPRIETARY NAMES: the phrase 'or equivalent' is to be deemed included whenever products are specified by proprietary name.

5.5 SINGLE SOURCES: where a choice of manufacturer or source of supply is allowed for any product or material, the whole quantity required to complete the work must be of the same type, manufacture and/or source. Do not change without approval.

5.6 SAMPLES: where approval of products or material is specified submit samples or other evidence of suitability. Do not confirm orders or use material until approval has been obtained. Retain approved samples on site for comparison with products and materials used in the works.

5.7 ARISINGS: remove from site and dispose of grass cuttings, weeds, prunings, leaves, litter, rubbish, dirt and other arisings unless specifically described as to be left or spread over beds etc. All green waste to be recycled. Contractors to hold a current Waste Carrier Licence.

5.8 MAKE GOOD: all damage consequent upon the work

6. ACCESS

6.1 The Contractor will be provided with the necessary keys to access the sites.

6.2 Public access shall not be impeded or denied by the Contractor unless previously approved by the Town Council, but the Contractor may ask members of the public to move so that works can be undertaken.

6.3 At all times, the sites will be kept clean and tidy.

7. MONITORING

7.1 The Contractor and the Town Council shall hold monthly performance review meetings. Such meetings may be held virtually (MS Teams, Zoom or similar), in person or at a specified site. The Contractor shall ensure that appropriate representatives from its organisation attend the review meetings.

7.2 The review meetings will be structured in such a way that the Town Council may:

- a) Monitor the performance of the Contractor
- b. Understand the Contractor's resources and capabilities
- c. Access trends in the marketplace; and
- d. Review the efficacy of the Agreement

7.3 The parties may agree, during the review meeting that in applicable circumstances (considering performance, complaints, and any other contractual aspects) the frequency of the review meetings can be reduced to an agreed frequency subject to the right of either party to re-instate the review meetings by providing two months written notice.

7.4 In addition, The Contractor and the Town Council shall hold bi-annual meetings to agree planting schemes and work schedules. One meeting to take place in February or March to agree the Autumn planting schemes and a meeting in September or October to agree the Spring planting schemes.

8. DISPOSAL OF WASTE

8.1 The contractor shall ensure that all waste collected, produced, or arising from the undertaking of the works is correctly and properly disposed of making use of composting, licensed and approved tips as appropriate.

9. WEATHER AND GROUND CONDITIONS

9.1 Work shall not be carried out with any machinery when ground conditions are such that detrimental effects may occur such as deep rutting and puddling.

9.2 The contractor shall make allowance for climatic variations which may impact on the schedule

10. HEALTH AND SAFETY

10.1 The Contractor shall ensure that employees working on the site are suitably qualified and assessed and provided with all protective clothing (PPE) applicable to the materials being applied and shall be given access to washing and cleaning facilities as necessary.

10.1 The contractor shall ensure that all materials are properly stored and transported, providing secure storage as required under current legislation.

11. GENERAL CONDITIONS

11.1 Grass will be cut, up to the paths, fencing or other boundary and all obstacles will be trimmed around and beneath.

11.2 Extreme care shall be taken when cutting around the base of trees to prevent damage.

11.3 Prior to cutting the area should be inspected for obstructions such as litter and dog fouling which shall be removed. If hypodermic needles are encountered, all necessary precautions should be taken when removing them.

11.4 All grass areas shall be cut cleanly and evenly to the same height between 20mm and 40mm, without damaging the existing surface. The finish shall be free of ribbing, skids, ruts and divots.

11.5 The Contractor shall ensure their machinery is maintained according to the manufacturer's guidelines and all operators are trained accordingly.

11.6 The contractor will send a copy of their public liability insurance to the Environment Officer annually.

11.7 The contractor shall ensure that the base of all seating, signs, tomb stones and fencing are clear of vegetation.

11.8 All arisings shall be removed from non-grass areas before leaving the site.

12. MAINTENANCE CLEANING

12.1 LITTER COLLECTION

12.1.1 Consists of collecting and removing to Contractor's tip all extraneous rubbish not arising from the contract work and which the Maldon Town Council considers detrimental to the appearance of the site, including stones, bricks, debris, paper, confectionery and other wrappings, bottles and cans and contents of dog litter bins, but excluding any arising from fly-tipping.

12.1.2 Is to be priced for whole areas, but Maldon Town Council may instruct partial collections by specifying particular areas.

12.1.3 It is to be carried out on a regular basis, every week throughout the year. The Maldon Town Council may require additional collections immediately following particular occasions and will give not less than three working days' notice.

12.1.4 Should fly-tipping be seen, on any of the sites, the Contractor is to report this to the Town Council via telephone and in writing.

12.2 SWEEPING HARD PAVED AREAS

12.2.1 sweep all roads, path, play areas, service yards and other hard paved areas free of mud, grit, debris etc. The use of mechanical air blowers is to be avoided.

12.3 HARD AREAS

12.3.1 where and when instructed, remove all weeds growing on, between or at the edges of roads, hard and semi-porous paved area. Refer to **Clause 2.23 General Requirements** for advice on seeking approval to use weed killer.

13. GRASSED GENERAL AREAS

13.1 REINSTATEMENT OF LAWNS: when instructed, worn areas are to be reinstated by removing the damaged turf to a depth of 20mm cultivated to a fine tilth and either:

13.1.1 Re-turfed using turf to BS 3969 selected to match existing, or

13.1.2 Filled with fine topsoil to BS 3882, free from stone, glass, and weeds and re-seeded with an amenity seed mix selected to match existing. Provide protection and watering as appropriate to permit successful germination and establishment.

13.2 LITTER COLLECTION AND MOWING: during the growing season, arrange for the regular litter collection to take place immediately before the regular mowing. Where this is not possible (e.g., where mowing is required more frequently than litter collection) remove any rubbish and debris from the grass before mowing.

13.3 GRASS CUTTING MACHINES: must be of an appropriate type, well maintained and correctly adjusted to give a clean even cut without damaging the grass.

13.4 MOWING GENERAL AMENITY GRASS AREAS: on a regular basis, and starting when instructed, leave all arisings, frequency as per schedule. Grass to be cut to a height of 20mm to 40mm in Summer and 40mm in Winter. Adjoining paths to be swept after grass cutting to remove all arisings.

13.5 ROUGH GRASS AREAS: it may be necessary to delay cutting until after annual flowers have re-seeded themselves.

13.6 WILDFLOWER AREAS: working in consultation with Maldon in Bloom, it may be necessary to delay cutting and clearing these beds until after the flowers have produced seed.

13.7 BULBS AND CORMS: Where these occur in grassed areas in the locations described or indicated on the drawings, do not commence the maintenance cutting of the bulb planted area until six weeks after they have flowered and died back, or until instructed.

13.8 REFER SCHEDULE: Sweep all adjoining hard areas clear of cuttings and remove. These operations are to be included in the rates for mowing areas.

13.9 GRASS EDGES: where instructed re-form edges, abutting paths, along

borders and around tree bases with a suitable edging tool, to clean straight lines or smooth curves, once during the season and once in winter. Draw back soil from edges to permit use of edging shears and remove all arisings.

13.10 SELECTIVE WEEDKILLER: in the event hand weeding has proved ineffective and ONLY with the written approval of the Town Council can a selective weedkiller be used. When authorised and where instructed and while actively growing, spray grass areas with a suitable approved selective herbicide. Spray only in calm conditions and prevent spray drift onto adjacent planting. Do not spray within three days after a cut, when rain is imminent or during drought conditions. Allow at least three days to elapse before cutting grass. Refer to Clause 2.2.3 (Introduction).

13.11 HAND WEED: means removing all weeds, including roots, by hand hoeing, digging or forking, taking care to remove not more than a minimum quantity of soil, causing minimum disturbance to mulched surfaces and bulbs and leaving the area in a neat, raked clean condition.

13.12 WEED CONTROL OF SHRUB BEDS AND TREE SURROUNDS:

13.12.1 New beds, i.e., where less than twenty-four months have elapsed since planting: hand weed five times evenly spaced during the growing season.

13.12.2 Established beds: hand weed once during the Spring and on two subsequent occasions during the growing season.

13.13 SOIL LEVEL ADJUSTMENT: reduce the level of the soil/mulch at the edges of beds to 50mm below the adjacent hard or grass surface on one occasion in Winter. Spread arisings evenly over the bed.

13.14 APPLYING AND MAINTAINING MULCH:

13.14.1 Where directed, immediately following the initial Spring hand weed, spread a full, even 75mm thickness of peat-free compost and/or pulverised bark evenly graded from 40mm down to fine particles.

13.14.2 A coarser grade should be specified if necessary.

13.14.3 During subsequent weeding and maintenance do not incorporate the mulch into the underlying soil.

13.14.4 During very dry weather check that the mulch does not become so dry as to be a fire hazard. If necessary, inform the Maldon Town Council and if instructed, thoroughly dampen the whole depth of the mulch.

13.14.5 An annual application of peat-free compost, pulverised bark or leaf mould, spread to an even 75mm, to be applied to the beds each Autumn.

13.15 ORGANIC BASED FERTILISER TO ESTABLISHED TREES AND SHRUBS:
Such a blood fish and bone to be undertaken during late March or early April apply one of the following or equivalent approved:

<u>Fertiliser</u>	<u>Application</u>	<u>Quantity</u>
15:15:15 N P K	Evenly spread	70gms per feathered,
Straight agricultural or slow-release type	within 300 mm radius of the plant	standard or heavier tree 40gms per whip or shrub

<u>Planting Tablets</u>	Each tablet in a 200mm deep augered hole at the drip line of plant	1 no. 10 gm tablet per whip 1 no.21 gm tablet per shrub 2 no. 21 gm tablets per feathered, standard or heavier tree
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14. FLOWER BEDS

14.1 PLANTING BEDS OF ANNUALS: twice per year in Autumn and Spring and when instructed plant out flower beds already formed, and tubs as follows:

14.1.1 Clear the previous season's bedding, including all bulbs and remove all arisings.

14.1.2 Dig over the beds, removing all trash and annual weeds. Carefully dig out perennial weeds and remove arisings. Either in Autumn or Spring (as instructed) haul, spread and incorporate compost or fertiliser.

14.1.3 Plant out annual bedding plants including edging plants, main layer, specimen or pot plants, corms, bulbs, or tubers in accordance with good horticultural practice. Keep plants watered as necessary before planting out and water in after planting.

14.1.4 Allow for any replanting which may be required, the plants being paid for by the contractor. Should the loss of the plants be because of the contractor's negligence in horticultural practice or otherwise, the cost of the replacement plants will be met by the contractor.

14.1.5 All plants used for bedding to be established by 6 weeks from plug size.

14.1.6 The use of perennial plants is to be included in the planting schemes at a ratio of 50:50 (perennial to annual) in the first year, increasing to a ratio of 70:30 (perennial to annual) in the third year of the Contract.

14.1.7 Suggested planting lists are provided as suggestions only. The contractor is not bound to adhere to these lists but should use their judgement and expertise to create current, imaginative and sustainable planting schemes.

14.1.8 the use of plants which are drought tolerant and flourish in clay soils to be used where possible.

14.1.9 Planting schemes are to be agreed with the Environment Officer during bi-annual meetings as stated in Clause 2.3 Monitoring

14.2 MAINTENANCE PLANTING BEDS OF PERENNIALS: existing flower beds containing perennials or a mixture of perennials and annuals to be maintenance planted as follows:

14.2.1 Replant gaps, where they occur, as instructed and in accordance with good horticultural practice. Keep plants watered as necessary before planting and water in after planting.

14.2.2 During Autumn, cut down the older flowering stems of herbaceous perennials, according to good horticultural practice, generally clean through the border and remove all arisings. Fork over the soil, taking care not to cause undue disturbance to the plants and apply a mulch of peat-free compost.

14.3 MAINTENANCE OF FLOWER BEDS: in addition to cleaning out, digging, planting and applying mulch as specified above, carry out routine maintenance as follows:

14.3.1 Remove all dead flower heads, remove all litter, thoroughly hand weed and lightly hoe all beds, clip grass edges fortnightly during summer season and monthly during the winter season. Remove all arisings.

14.3.2 Keep all beds free from fallen Autumn leaves and remove all arisings. Allow for removal on three occasions in November/December.

14.3.3 Re-form grass edges of beds with a suitable edging tool once in winter. Draw back soil from edges to permit use of edging shears and remove all arisings.

15. TREES, HEDGES AND SHRUB AREAS

15.1 TREES STAKES AND TIES: inspect in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter and additionally immediately after strong winds.

15.1.1 Inspect and make good as necessary all tree stakes. Check stakes for looseness, breaks and decay and replace as necessary. If any tree with a defective stake has grown sufficiently to be self-supporting, inform the Maldon Town Council and, if instructed, remove the stake and ties and fill the post hole with soil, lightly compacted.

15.1.2 Replacement stakes to be 75mm diameter peeled softwood poles without projections, pointed at the base, stakes to project 750 mm above ground, single rubber tie and spacer 25mm from top of stake, pressure treated to BS 1282 with approved preservative to 8.5 kg/m minimum net dry salt retention. Drive into existing post hole and wedge as necessary to make

secure. Refix or replace tree ties as appropriate, allowing for growth since planting.

15.1.3 Replacement stakes for trees not subject to vandalism subject to the approval of the Town Council, to be modified one-third tree stakes in accordance with DoE Arboricultural Research Note ARB/40/82, preservative treated and with ties as specified above.

15.1.4 Adjust and refix ties as necessary to make secure, allow for stem growth and prevent chafing. Where chafing has occurred, re-position tie(s) or replace with an approved type to prevent further chafing.

15.1.5 Replace damaged or missing ties. Replacement ties to be of rubber approved, and of the following widths:

Extra heavy and heavy standard trees: 40mm

Standard and feathered trees: 25mm

15.1.6 Remove redundant tapes, tags, ties, labels and other encumbrances.

15.1.7 Replace any dead shrubs with the same species or similar

15.2 GUY WIRES: Inspect in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter and additionally immediately after strong winds. Adjust to confirm the stem growth and to correct tension.

15.3 RE-FIRMING: Ensure that all trees and shrubs remain firmly bedded in the ground after strong winds, frost, heave and other disturbances. Re-firm by treading around the base. Any 'collars' at the base of trunks created by tree movement to be broken by the fork, back filled with topsoil as necessary and refirmed.

15.4 TREE GRILLES: Where instructed, lift tree grilles and make up levels with horticultural grit or other approved material, lightly compacted, and relay to level. Neatly refill the interstices of the grids with grit and lightly compact.

15.5 PRUNING GENERALLY

15.5.1 Pruning is to be carried out using sharp secateurs, approved mechanical hedge cutters, and handsaws. Trim off ragged edges of bark or wood with a sharp knife.

15.5.2 Where instructed remove branches without damaging or tearing the stem.

15.5.3 Notify the Town Council of the incidence of disease or fungus.

15.5.4 Remove all arisings.

15.6 PRUNING TREES

15.6.1 Feathered trees are not to be pruned.

15.6.2 Where instructed, crown prune standard trees up to 4m high by removing dead branches and reducing selected side branches by one third to preserve a well-balanced head, in each case cutting back to live wood.

15.6.3 Extensive pruning of standard trees and any surgery to larger trees must be carried out by a member of the Arboricultural Association or other suitably qualified tree surgeon.

15.6.4 All pruning on Maldon Town Council sites to be undertaken with the approval of the Tree Officer, Maldon District Council.

15.7 PRUNING SHRUBS AND ROSES:

15.7.1 Remove all suckers by cutting back level with the source stem or root.

15.7.2 Remove all dead foliage by cutting back to an outward pointing bud, or as directed by the Town Council.

15.7.3 Reduce the amount of growth on shrubs to encourage flower and fruit and remove any growth encroaching onto grassed areas, path, road, signs, sight lines and lights, cutting back to outward pointing bud.

15.7.4 Vary the amount and nature of thinning, trimming, and shaping according to species, variety, season, stage of growth and required visual effect, as well as location, taking into account public safety.

15.7.5 Flowering species to be pruned as follows:

- shrub flowering in Winter: prune in Spring.
- shrub flowering in Spring and early Summer: prune immediately after flowering.
- shrub flowering in early summer and early Autumn: cut back to old wood in Winter.
- rose bushes: prune in early spring to encourage basal growths and a balanced, compact habit.

15.8 TRIMMING ESTABLISHED HEDGES: the main trimming is to take place in November or December each year. Trim carefully and neatly to regular line and shape, with the width at the top less than that at the base, using suitable mechanical cutters unless otherwise specified. Remove current growth rather than old wood. Remove all arisings.

15.9 CLIMBING PLANTS:

15.9.1 Inspect and maintain as specified on four occasions throughout the year (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) during the year.

15.9.2 Remove excess growth by pruning, including any encroaching onto footpaths, highways signboards or windows.

15.9.3 Attach insecure growth to supporting wires by black pvc coated 1.00 m gauge steel wire.

15.10 WEEDING ROUGH GRASS AREAS once per year, in late Spring, walk through rough grass areas to hand weed:

Docks (Rumex spp.)
Thistles (Cirsium spp.)
Willowherb (Epilobium spp.)

Ragworts (Senecio spp.)
Nettles (Urtica spp.)
Borage (Borago spp.)

15.11 If hand weeding proves ineffective the Contractor should refer to Clause 2.2.3 (Introduction) to seek written approval for the use of a selective weed killer and the reasoning.

15.12 ORGANIC BASED FERTILISER: Spring Application as instructed apply either:

14.12.1 Straight agricultural (15:15:15: N:P:K:) at 350 kgs/ha or

14.12.2 Slow-release type at 250kgs/ha.

15.13 ORGANIC BASED FERTILISER: Autumn Application as instructed apply 3:12:12: N:P: K: at 700kgs/ha

16. FLORAL DECORATIONS

16.1 All plants used to be established by 6 weeks from plug size.

16.2 Baskets to be planted with plug plants ready to go out prior to the late May Bank Holiday.

16.3 INSTALLATION

16.3.1 **Summer** – The season will commence prior to the late May Bank Holiday weekend to 15th October in each year.

16.3.2 Sites to be planted **War Memorial, Town Sign, Floral Boat, Various Tubs, Hanging Baskets and Mangers**

16.3.3 **Winter** – Season will commence on 20th October to 1 week prior to Late May Bank Holiday weekend each year
War Memorial, Town Sign, Floral Boat, Various Containers

16.3.4 All fixings to be checked annually for safety.

15.3.5 The soil in the troughs on the Moot Hall balcony to be changed annually.

16.4 CONSTRUCTION OF BASKETS/MANGER

All baskets and manger to be lined with moss and punched plastic. To be filled with a suitable peat-free hanging basket compost.

16.5 MAINTENANCE / WATERING - **Summer Months – Moot Hall, War Memorial, Town Hall, Town Sign, Floral Boat, Various Containers**

16.5.1 All tubs, troughs, town sign, floral boat, hanging baskets and mangers to contain water retaining crystals, if reservoir baskets are not being used.

16.5.2 All tubs, troughs, town sign, floral boat, hanging baskets and mangers to be watered as necessary, a minimum of three times per week.

16.5.3 All plants to be fed with an organic based fertilizer once per week.

16.5.4 All plants to be “dead headed” once per week.

16.6 MAINTENANCE / WATERING - Winter months – War Memorial, Town Sign, Floral Boar, Various Containers

16.6.1 Watering and maintenance to be administered as necessary according to the weather conditions.

APPENDIX A

SUGGESTED PLANT SPECIES

Plant List A - Larger Plants (summer)

Surfinia Petunia
Petunia Million Bells
Trailing Fushia
Geranium Ivy Leaf
Geranium

Begonia (cascading varieties)
Small Cordyline, Canna Lily or
focal plant for the centre of the
tub of equal value.
Foliage plants

Plant List B - Smaller Plants (summer)

Begonia
Petunia
Verbena
Diascia
Nicotiana
Tagetes

Marigolds
Impatiens
Bidens
Scaevola
Bacopa

Plant List C (winter)

Bellis
Myosotis
Wallflowers
Pansy
Polyanthus

Hardy grasses

APPENDIX B

Garden Organic - Henry Doubleday Research Association: No Dig Method

www.gardenorganic.org.uk/no-dig-method

For an area that is already cultivated:

1. Apply at least 15cms or more of an organic, well decomposed mulch to the beds. You do not need to dig beforehand, as soil organisms such as worms will rise to the mulch, eat and digest it, creating a rich and well-textured soil.
2. Firm it down.
3. Plant or sow direct into the surface compost. There will be less to hoe, which are easy to deal with in the soft surface. The soil beneath is firm but not compacted, as the undisturbed soil organisms develop a honeycomb of small air passages – perfect for plant root penetration.
4. To sow seeds, use a rake to prepare a soft, crumbly tilth on the surface.
5. Use a trowel to remove any weed regrowth through mulches. Annual weeds will die within 2 to 3 months; but perennials take longer – often up to a year. Only bindweed and mares tail can survive, but they become noticeably weaker. And as the soil becomes more friable and richer, it is easier to pull out the long root systems in bindweed, for instance.
6. Ongoing maintenance involves annual applications of just 5cms or so of compost or manure. This should be applied ideally in the autumn, when crops/plants are cleared, or in spring on beds where winter crops/plants have been growing.

To clear a growing area of weeds i.e., a new allotment, or to create a new bed

You will need:

1. Plenty of organic matter
2. A sheet of light-excluding material, such as cardboard
3. The aim is simple - to exclude the light so weeds cannot grow. And to cover the soil with a rich organic mulch.
4. First slash down tall weed foliage to ground level. Put it on the compost heap.
5. Lay sheets of light-excluding material (cardboard etc) so the ground is completely covered. We do not recommend plastic unless it can be reused and will not degrade into the soil; nor is carpet a good idea. Modern carpets are treated with chemicals and dyes that can leach poisons onto the soil.
6. Now put a deep layer of organic mulch. Use homemade compost, fully-rotted manure, leaves, straw, grass mowings – or even a mix of them all, so long as it is more than 15 - 20cms thick.

7. Tread it down firmly. Eventually it will rot down and create a wonderful, friable soil texture which is not only rich but allows weed roots, such as bindweed, to be pulled out easily.
8. If you use a horticultural membrane such as Mypex, you can put the mulch under, not over, it.
9. Either way, make sure that no light can penetrate down into the soil.
10. In both instances, wait for 6 months at least for the weeds to die down and the soil organisms to do their work. Be patient! It can take up to a year to completely weaken the weeds, especially those with deep and extensive roots like bindweed, dock and bramble. The soil has become so rich and friable that you will be able to pull roots out easily.