



Mille Lacs Lake Watershed Management Group

Healthy Land, Healthy Lake

Topic of the Month – June 2019

Ready to Plant?

By: Barb Eller

Here are a few tips from a lazy, frugal farmer/gardener. Having joined the Medicare Crowd, I eschew expensive inputs to my plantings. I love clean water and the health benefits it provides. Therefore, in preparing a site for plantings of any kind, I choose the least work intensive, least expensive, and cleanest alternatives available.

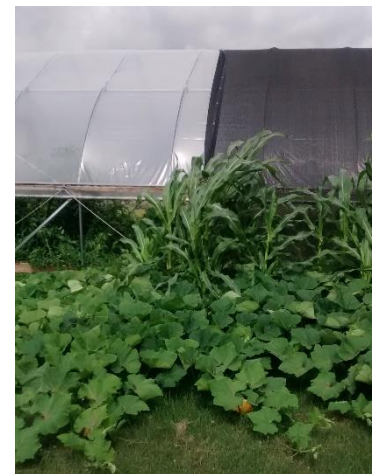
Many folks may reach for the expedient, quickest and latest chemical to destroy unwanted plants in a desired planting site. That only meets one criteria of 'least work', violating 'least expense' and 'clean'. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture provides a list of chemicals currently found in our ground and surface waters.

http://mdawebdev.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/2017wqmrpt_final.pdf

My favorite way to prep a garden spot is to simply lay down a heavy compostable mulch such as cardboard and cover in 6-8 inches of well-composted manures and/or black soil. This bed is ready for planting immediately. As the cardboard disintegrates, the plant roots extend into undisturbed soil that retains its microbiome and includes the nutrients from the soon dead/smothered grass or unwanted plants underneath. Worms rise to the occasion and provide the needed soil aeration for healthy roots.

This bed of corn and squash thrived in such a prepared bed and required very little weeding as it shaded out most other plants.

Another way to reduce the work of unwanted plants is to plant through a heavier, mulch such as landscaping fabric. This, too, will smother unwanted plants. Only a little bit of extra digging is required, and it allows water to infiltrate to the plants. Re-use the fabric or leave in place. Heavy straw or woodchips also are good mulches. Uproot the few unwanted plants that emerge and add them to the mulch layer.



Other methods of site preparation include sheet mulching. This lays down a heavy layer of black plastic that can smother/kill unwanted plants in larger areas. The advantage is that it works in 2-3 weeks, but now I must take up and do something with the plastic, prep the soil for planting, use mulch around my new plants to avoid unwanted plants and undesirable water run-off. Solarization works similarly, except you use clear plastic in full sun thus cooking the underlying vegetation prior to site prep. This does not work in shady spots.

Happy lazy, frugal, clean planting!