

Starting to Work

- On your first visit to your plot, decide what work you need to do to bring it back to cultivation. Adapt your gardening to your abilities and the amount of time you can spend.
- Digging the soil is one of the most physically demanding activities in gardening, as it involves continual bending and straightening of the back while lifting a spadeful of soil. Do a little at a time to prevent back problems.
- In a new plot, or a plot neglected for several years, digging the soil over thoroughly before planting is important. If the previous gardener looked after the plot well, you can probably use a fork or spade to hand dig the soil. Digging is important as it loosens the earth, letting air and moisture in and breaking up hard compacted earth – but take it easy with the hard labour, and do a little at a time.
- If the plot is overgrown with long grass or weeds such as brambles you may need to use a strimmer or hedge clippers to cut them down.
- On weedy plots, plant large leafed crops such as potatoes, courgettes or runner beans, which will smother weeds.
- You will still need to remove weeds regularly to prevent your crops being overrun by weeds during the first months of cultivation.
- Some people prefer to use methods of cultivation that do not involve digging. Mulches of compost or thick polythene are perfectly acceptable, as are green manures on fallow ground.
- The best time for digging is autumn or early winter if you want to be ready for seed sowing in spring. If you dig in compost, manure or the remnants of last year's crop, worms and micro-organisms will break it down over the winter.