



Removing Couch Grass From Your Vegetable Garden

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Couch grass is a major problem weed, especially if it is in your vegetable patch. It spreads very quickly via runners and when weeding it you only have to leave the tiniest piece in the ground and it will regenerate itself. Its only saving grace is that it is shallow rooted and does not readily produce seeds, which means if you can entirely remove it from your vegetable patch it is possible to keep it out with the use of barriers. Here are two ways you can effectively remove couch.



Couch grass (*Cynodon dactylon*)

Hand weeding method

1. Mark out a defined area of no more than two or three square metres and dig a trench around it to below the root structure of the couch (about 25 centimetres deep), severing the couch runners as you dig.
2. Hold the end of one of the runners and gently lift it while at the same time using a small trowel to loosen the soil below and around the runner. The aim is to remove the runner in as long a section as possible. Repeat the process until you think you have removed all the runners.
3. Thoroughly turn over the soil, picking out any pieces of couch that you see.
4. Leave the bed bare for at least three months, watering it regularly to encourage any remaining couch to grow. Check the bed on a weekly basis, if you see any emerging couch grass shoots then dig down until you have located the base of the shoot and remove it. Once a month completely turn the bed over with a hoe and cut back any couch runners on the outside of the trench to stop them growing back into the bed. As long as the

trench is deep enough the couch runners will not grow under it so they will be easy to spot and remove.

5. If no new couch shoots have appeared for several weeks then it is reasonably safe to plant the bed out with vegetables, however for the next few months pay very close attention to the bed and dig down and remove any couch runners that appear.



The wrong way to weed couch grass.



The right way to weed couch grass.

The smothering method

1. The hand weeding method only works if you have soft friable soil and if the area you are weeding is fairly small. If you need to remove couch from hard ground or a large area then the best way is to smother it.
2. Mark out a defined area and dig a trench around it as described for the hand weeding method.
3. Place thick layers of newspaper (at least 20 sheets) and/or sheets of cardboard over top and sides into the bottom of the surrounding trench.
4. Place bricks or lengths of wood in the bottom of the trench at regular intervals to hold the paper and cardboard in place. Cover the top of the bed with a layer of mulch.
5. Check the bed on a weekly basis. If you see any couch breaking through then remove it and cover the breached area with more newspaper or cardboard. Cut back any couch runners on the outside of the trench to stop them growing back into the bed.
6. Leave the bed for at least four months, longer if the bed has been left over winter as couch is dormant when the weather is cold.
7. Turn the bed over thoroughly so that the now degraded newspaper and cardboard is broken up and mixed into the soil.
8. Monitor the bed on a weekly basis, If any couch shoots appear then dig down to the base of the shoots and remove them. After several weeks without any signs of shoots the bed is now ready to be planted out.
9. An alternative to newspaper and cardboard is to cover the bed with black builder's plastic, using U pins to hold it in place on the edges.