

## A How to Guide for Colony Farm Members With New Grass Plots

How to go from this...



To this...



## Introduction

Starting a new plot from grass is no easy undertaking and involves a lot of work. This work can be minimized with proper planning.

The following is a step by step guide designed to assist Colony Farm members with the development of new grass plots. Its intention is also to inspire experienced and new gardeners.

This guide by no means is the only way to achieve success, but it has been tried and tested.

This document has been created by a first year member, and all pictures shown are of their plot in a single season.



## Getting Started

So you've decided to take up a new plot...Great! Before you grab a shovel, there are a few things to consider that will assist you with your digging.

- **Where's the nearest hose?** Pulling the hose through your plot can damage your plants and your neighbours' plants, so be sure to plan for accessibility or consider hand watering.
- **How will you access your plot?** Plan on creating paths for entry/exit, and also have designated walking paths that allow easy access to your plants for watering, trimming, harvesting, etc.
- **Veggies? Flowers? Seating areas?** It helps to have an idea of what you want and where. It's not always necessary to turn over 250 sq.ft. of grass depending on your intentions. The point is, think about the what and the where before you jump into the digging.

## The “Fun” Part...Digging!

Some people relish the idea of hours of grunt work turning sod...for others, maybe not so much.

The following breaks down the sod turning process (if that's what you choose to do) and will give you an idea of what to expect. It will also provide you with a few hints along the way.

- **How to turn grass to dirt?** There are a few options here and all involve hard work. The first is to remove the grass by stripping/tearing it off. This isn't recommended as you'll end up losing lots of great soil, not to mention lower the ground elevation of your plot making it a swimming pool the next time it rains! Another option is to cover your grass plot with newspaper or cardboard and layer away with manure, leaves, Sea Soil, compost, etc. This doesn't involve any digging but does involve lots of hauling materials and can get expensive. The next option, and recommended option, is to turn the sod over on your plot. Turning sod over is hard work on a 10'x25' plot! Plan on about 8-10 hours of “grunt” work with a shovel. Lots of digging, bending, and for most, blisters on your hands. Save time and energy by keeping entry/exit and walking paths grass by planning ahead! The following is a tried and tested method of turning the sod on your plot.
  - Mark out where your entry/exit, walking path(s), and plot edges will be using small stakes (bamboo or other) and twine. Hint - An 18”-24” wide x 21’ long path down the middle of a single plot works great! You can turn the whole plot and have dirt paths, but it's a little more work.
  - Using the stakes and twine lines as a guide along with a shovel, turn the sod over in single rows at a time. Each row should be roughly 12” wide. Step down on your shovel and “outline/cut” each row into the grass. Divide each row into 12”x12” boxes by “cutting” them into the grass. Using your shovel, pry up each 12”x12” chunk of sod and turn the chunk upside down (grass side down/buried). Try not to break down the chunks of sod and don't worry about bits of grass poking up just yet.
  - When your plot has been completely turned, let the chunks of sod dry out over a week or so. Next up is breaking up the chunks of sod and spreading the dirt around. Get a strong/sturdy rake and “whack your plot!” Break the chunks of sod apart with the rake to level off your plot, but don't dig down at all. If you dig up and expose the grass roots, you'll be fighting lots of grass all season!
  - When your plot is more or less level, it's a good time to amend your soil. You might have luck planting directly into the turned over sod, but you'll more than likely find your plants will not grow so well. Be sure to follow all Colony Farm guidelines when adding materials to your plot. Lime and Sea Soil work great but can get expensive, not to mention tiring depending on how far away your plot is from the parking lot. Consider using communal compost, purchasing manure tickets, and

using grass clippings as mulch by collecting it on grass trimming days. This is also the time to bury those grass bits, so be sure to pile up enough material on those areas. Hint - Remember to wait a couple weeks or so before planting when using manure as it can “burn” seedlings/seeds and kill them!

- Now it’s finally time to plant! Be careful when digging holes for seeds/plants so as to not disturb those grass roots, otherwise your hard work will be wasted and the grass will be making a reappearance! Note - Some grass will no doubt show up, but it will be easy enough to pluck out as it starts.
- **How’s the soil?** Your plants will need food and you’ll have to amend the soil with extra nutrients at some point. Turned over grass will eventually turn to compost but your plants will no doubt need more food! Consider using the communal compost and purchasing manure tickets as well as using grass clippings. Also, consider purchasing some lime and always remember Sea Soil is gold! If you decide to plant directly into the sod, monitor your plants carefully and if they seem to be struggling or seem small, they’ll more than likely need a meal of something!





### Time to Plant!

- **What to plant and where?** Figure out what direction your plot faces and how best to utilize light and shade. Also, check and see what your neighbours have on their plot to get an idea of where shade will be on your plot. Space plants appropriately using their mature growth size. Start by seeding more than you need and thinning/moving plants as they grow. Grow some for the bugs and some for yourself as organic gardening means living and dealing with pests appropriately. Hint - Kale, swiss chard, squash, beets, beans, peas, blueberries, and many other plants and flowers all do really well at Colony Farm so be creative!
- **Now what?** So your soil is ready and your seeds have been planted, oh what to do next? Besides from watching your plants grow, watering, and weeding, there are many other things to consider. A greenhouse or row cover is a great addition to a plot and greatly assists tomatoes and peppers. Fences can keep unwanted pests out and help define your plots boundaries. Compost piles/bins are great ideas, and rain barrels/gutters can be attached to greenhouses too! Most important, **HAVE FUN!**

