



How To Solarize

Summer is the best time of year to solarize. The air is warm, but more importantly, this is when the sun has its greatest heating potential. After six weeks or so, your lawn will be gone with a minimum investment of time, energy, money, and best of all – no herbicides!

1. Cut your lawn very, very short. Make the surface as smooth and even as possible.
2. Irrigate to saturate the soil one to two feet deep. Wet soil heats up much faster.
3. Cover the lawn with 2 to 4 mil *clear* (black plastic does not work as well) plastic sheeting (available in the paint section of the hardware store). This is the most environmentally "*unfriendly*" part. Spread the plastic so it is in contact with the soil surface, leaving as little air space as possible.
4. Extend the plastic 6 to 8 inches beyond the edges of the grass. The edges don't heat as well as the center so extending the plastic ensures even heating throughout.
5. If the area is large enough to need several sheets of plastic, overlap the seams.
6. Anchor around the edges of the plastic with rocks, bricks, wood planks, mounds of soil, etc.
7. Turn automatic irrigation off.
8. Wait six to eight weeks.
9. Remove the plastic carefully. If the plastic doesn't have UV inhibitor (nice but not necessary), it will likely fall apart by the time the lawn is dead.

To make the process even more effective, spread a second layer of plastic over the first. Use planks of wood or bricks to create a few inches of air gap between them. Research shows that the second plastic layer raises soil temperature another 2 to 10 degrees.

Since the plastic is clear, you can watch the lawn turn from green to yellow, then to straw brown. Once that happens, let the plastic sit another week or two, just to be sure.

When the lawn is dead, remove the dead grass stubble with a power thatcher. Loosen the surface of the soil as you thatch. Be sure that most of the soil surface is exposed. Core-aeration, followed by a light top dressing of Turface, fertilizer and lime to backfill the aeration holes is recommended before planting, but is optional.

Since solarization works best in the upper foot or so of soil, **do not rototill the soil after you are done.** (Actually, it's best not to rototill--ever. Rototilling, or turning the soil deeply, brings seeds and pathogens to the surface where they will proliferate.)