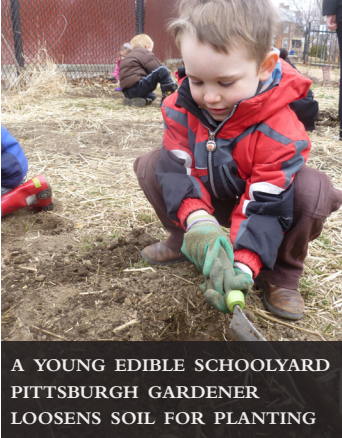




## How-To: PREPARING FOR SPRING

*The official start of spring is in mid-March, and some crops can be planted even earlier. Here are several ways to get a jump-start on the season by prepping the garden. Start as soon as early March.*



A YOUNG EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD  
PITTSBURGH GARDENER  
LOOSENS SOIL FOR PLANTING



VOLUNTEERS AT BRADDOCK  
FARMS REMOVE MULCH TO  
PREPARE FOR PLANTING

### CONSIDER REMOVING MULCH

Mulch on the garden over the winter protects the soil and keeps it from eroding. If your layer of mulch is very thick and the ground below is frozen, removing the mulch will help the soil to warm up and dry out more quickly. Plan to remove mulch a few days before planting, if the forecast is for sunny days with no rain.

### PULL BACK THICK MULCH AROUND BULBS

Even if you choose to leave the mulch layer intact, if you've planted bulbs like garlic, shallots, or flowers, check to make sure their growth isn't compromised. It's fine to leave a thin mat of mulch around the base of a sprouting bulb, but mulch that is very thick (4- 6 inches or more) can stifle the plant's spring growth. You'll know there's too much mulch covering a plant if the new growth is thin, twisted, and pale green or yellow. Simply remove some of the mulch to allow the plant to access sunlight.

### TEST THE SOIL

If you are planting in the ground or raised beds and haven't already done a soil test, check the garden area to see if it is frozen. If so, wait for a few mostly sunny days, with temps above freezing and check again. When you can dig down several inches, collect soil samples from the garden area. You'll want to send in separate samples for areas that are significantly different from each other (for instance, bottom of a hill vs. top of a hill, area that tends to be wet and soggy vs. a dry and rocky area). Bring the soil inside and spread it out on newspaper. When it is completely dry, send it to a lab to be tested. We recommend working with the University of Massachusetts for initial testing, as it's a very affordable option. If heavy metals come back high, send another sample to Penn State University to confirm the exact amount in the soil.

### AMEND THE SOIL

Based on soil test results, you may need to add certain amendments (some examples include: rock phosphate, greensand, and blood meal) to the soil for optimal plant growth. You can incorporate these when you're planting, or prepare the soil now and plant later. For containers, plan to remove about a quarter to one-third of the potting mix and refresh what's left of the old mix with compost. For raised beds or in-ground gardens, if you haven't done a soil test and want to revitalize your soil, add compost!



## How-To: PREPARING FOR SPRING



AN EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD  
PITTSBURGH CLASS SOWS SEEDS  
FOR EARLY SPRING CROPS



VOLUNTEERS AT BRADDOCK  
FARMS REMOVE WEEDS AND  
LOOSEN SOIL FOR PLANTING

### PLAN SPRING CROPS

There are many crops you can seed directly in your garden in early spring. Folk lore states that peas can go in the ground on St. Patrick's Day, and we often seed lettuce, mesclun greens, cooking greens, radishes, scallions, and turnips around the same time. Most of these crops will have finished producing by the time you'll want to plant summer crops like tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and zucchini. So they make a great first step for succession plantings – where one crop follows another one in the same spot.

### PREPARE SOIL FOR PLANTING

Loosening the soil in the garden can make planting seeds an easier task, and give tiny roots a better shot at pushing through. In small garden spaces, use a trowel or broadfork to loosen and aerate the soil. In very large gardens, a tiller makes the job easier. However, we don't recommend tilling garden soil on a regular basis, as it can disturb the microorganisms in the soil and create a compacted layer of soil called hardpan. Till only when soil has dried out enough that it doesn't "clump" when tilled (in a wet year, this can be late spring).

For medium to large spaces, cover crops that winterkill, like oats, and mulch can help protect a loose soil structure and make tilling less necessary. To plant after cover cropping or mulching, simply rake away the debris and start planting!

Get planting spaces ready by keeping weeds under control from the very beginning of the season. Remove large weeds by hand and cultivate regularly with a hoe to get rid of small weeds.