

No Dig Gardening

A talk by Charles Dowding to Hayling Horticultural Society

Friday 2nd November 2018



Charles Dowding is a gardener particularly well known for his concept of 'No Dig' Gardening. Graduating from Cambridge with a degree in geography led to his lifelong pursuit of an interest in the land to produce organic crops in a time efficient and productive way. He has spent time in Africa and France before starting his latest venture in Somerset where *"There was a rapid creation and evolution of Homeacres garden, transformed in six months from weedy wilderness to productive plot, without turning a sod"*.

He has appeared on Gardener's World and gives regular talks to promote his passionate belief in what he calls the #charlesdowdingmethod.

Charles gave a fascinating and insightful talk on his 'No Dig' approach to gardening and explained how to have healthy soil and enjoy easier harvests, followed by questions and answers. Everything was backed up by facts based on his experimental approach which enables him to record and analyse yields resulting from the different methods of producing crops.



The concept is based simply on the need to reduce the amount of digging to avoid disruption of the soil which already has a structure and to feed the soil life with organic matter on the surface, as it happens naturally, to maintain drainage and aeration.

Charles stressed this works on all soils including heavy clay. If the area is covered in weeds, for the first year Charles advocates the use of a mulch to exclude light such as cardboard or polythene and this helps to kill perennial weeds. This can be removed after the first year and any weeds that then appear be removed by hand.

As well as reducing the time and effort needed to cultivate and weed, no dig has many other benefits, such as increased yields, easier harvesting and maintenance.

He is also a great proponent of the beauty of vegetable growing and showed this in the many photos of his own smallholding.

A more recent development is the production of salad leaves which he makes into salad bags. Using the no dig approach, he grows a wide variety of plants and picks the outer leaves only to keep the plants in a state of 'perpetual teenagerhood'! He also advocates growing some seeds in clumps to promote more productive growth and more efficient use of space. This does not apply to all plants though.

Charles was keen to dispel many 'Garden Myths'. For example, he adds blighted tomatoes and weeds to his compost and they have no detrimental effect.



Before he answered a multitude of questions from the audience Charles was keen to stress that *"No dig is not a religion, sometimes you need a spade, say to cut out bramble roots or make a hole for planting tree!"*

Charles brought along a selection of his signed books, calendars and salad bags all of which attracted a great deal of interest. It was certainly a fascinating talk and gave everyone a great deal of inspiration for ideas to take back to their own gardens and allotments.

To find out more visit his website
www.charlesdowding.co.uk

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