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Making Use of Weeds the Lazy Way

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Making use of what you have... and everyone has weeds!

If you go for a walk through the bush or a forest or any natural area at all, the ground is littered with dead grass, leaves, sticks and even branches and fallen trees and all the plants live there quite happily, making their own compost and soil and mulch, without any human help. What the plants took from the soil to grow, is returned to the soil when they die and it rots away, ready for other plants to use. The mulch that forms over the soil is a nice light cover for germinating seeds or emerging bulbs and protects them from the sharp eyes of animals, birds and insects and stops them drying out in the heat.

This is what I do in my garden.... copy nature and what happens is that the soil becomes rich and full of humus and worms and all good things. In large garden beds the weeds often get away from me but I never worry because I see them as the compost and mulch of the future. When I am ready, I simply pull them up and lay them on the surface, between the shrubs and trees etc.

I do not add anything to this soil, ever. Many thousands of generations of worms live and die here, transforming debris into soil and billions of micro-organisms do what they do too. Most of what can be seen on the surface is long grass and weeds, pulled out of the soil and laid on top. Soon it loses its green colour and resembles forest litter, a much better appearance than bare soil, I think, and mimics nature too.

If the prunings are rather too thick and ugly, they go through the mulcher first but usually, because I am a very lazy gardener, I just chop it up with my spade, where it lands or walk over it a bit to break it up and flatten it out. Usually I don't walk on the garden but this area is big and can't be reached from the edges and once I have covered the ground like this, it softens the foot-fall and reduces the impact on the soil.

Making use of weeds in the vegetable garden

Basically I am a lazy gardener.... or I could say I am an efficient gardener.... I believe in doing as little unnecessary work as possible. That way I have more time to do the things that I want to do in the garden and the kitchen. If I was very artistic and clever I could draw up a lovely sketch of my garden to illustrate what I want to say but sadly I am neither..... so you will have to just have my words instead.

My main vegetable garden is a series of concentric, half-circle beds, each separated by a narrow sawdust path. Each bed is therefore a long curve, about 1 metre wide. I don't have rigid edges but rather I try to maintain fairly steep slopes between the beds and the paths. Sometimes the beds are higher than the paths and sometimes they are lower and here is why....

At the end of summer, the paths are lower than the beds.... you will see why if you read on.

In autumn, I start removing the summer crops as they finish and some of this goes to the chooks and the coarse stuff goes to a pile to be mulched up, but some is thrown onto the paths.... things that the chooks don't

like..... Then, as the weather cools down and we get some rain, the weeds begin to grow rapidly and I pull them out and throw them on the paths too.

Eventually it is time to pull out the cucumber vines, bean creepers, capsicums tomatoes etc and although these are often too coarse for the paths, they were surrounded by straw and now all that straw goes onto the paths too because I like to open the soil in the beds to the elements, over winter.

By winter the paths are pretty well piled up to the top of the garden bed height but I keep treading them down as I walk and because the straw is on top, it looks pretty tidy. During winter there is a fair bit of rain and also sun and lots of worms and insects are busy decomposing all the paths. As I weed during winter I sometimes just tuck the weeds under the straw on the paths, because the chooks have plenty of grass in their run by now.

By mid-spring or so I am wanting some compost to dig into the top of the beds to plant the summer vegetables and guess what?? I don't need to bring it in with a wheelbarrow because it is there, on the paths..... beautiful, rich and conveniently placed under a little straw. So I scrape away the remains of the straw and dig out the paths, putting the compost onto the beds. At this stage I remake the sloping edges of the beds to keep them nice too.

So, by early to mid-summer the paths are low again as all the compost has been used up. Then, I get more bales of straw and lay them onto the beds..... and next autumn they will be removed to the paths and so the process goes on.

Also, any bark from gum trees and heaps of coarse, dry things are put through the mulcher any time of the year and this is also put on the paths to make them nice to walk on and this all rots down too and is shovelled up onto the beds eventually.

Sometimes.... just sometimes, it pays to be lazy.....

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