

# Compost is as good as gold in gardens

When we finished preparing our planting beds, planting the larger trees, and laying the sod at our studio last fall, we decided to leave the rest of the planting until spring.

Upon reflection, this decision was a very good one. Leaving the beds open gave us the opportunity to properly maintain the newly-planted trees without trampling ground covers or disturbing shrubs.

We prepared a large watering dish around each tree to facilitate a thorough soaking of the root balls. Watering dishes are built by forming a soil ring or dike around the tree, outside the rootball, on undisturbed soil. When you fill the watering dish with water, the water thoroughly soaks the root ball, rather than running over the soil surface away from the tree. These watering dishes should be left in place for several months to ensure the tree is kept consistently moist while it's developing new roots and root hairs.

Leaving the beds open for several months also dramatically reduced the amount of hand-weeding we had to do. As you know, we always use compost to prepare our planting beds, rather than topsoil or triple mix.

Compost usually contains a very generous supply of weed seeds and our compost was no exception. Because we did not plant the smaller shrubs and perennials right away, as the weeds germinated, we simply used a hoe to uproot the weeds. Leaving them on the soil surface a few days, they quickly dried up and formed a new layer of compost for the soil.

Once we planted the garden in the spring, there were very few weed seeds left to germinate. The odd weed that popped up was

hand-pulled while it was still very young. It's important to note here that when you use compost to prepare your beds, the soil does not compact as readily, resulting in a loose, friable soil that is easy to work and cultivate. One of the great pleasures of gardening is to



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## Garden gate

be able to bend over, pull out a weed, and have it easily slip out of the soil, root and all.

One of the main reasons we're happy we waited to plant our garden is that it gave us a chance to reflect on the shapes of beds and lawn we had created and to walk through the garden and really get a feel for the spaces. We had the whole winter ahead of us to ponder what plants we would like to place in each of the garden rooms and what character each area would have.

Every day, we would drive past the garden and talk about what the garden might look like. As we shovelled the snow, we would pause and observe the different views, deciding which ones to

• see PLANNING on page 16

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