

## SMOTHERING

For preparing sites smaller than a few thousand square feet, smothering weeds can be effective. It is a simple technique that requires no chemicals or special equipment.

The idea behind smothering is simple: A plant can't live without sunlight, so covering the soil surface for an extended period of time will kill the unwanted plants underneath.



*Be sure that the smothering medium is firmly anchored and pulled tightly to the grounds surface.*

Black plastic is a common choice for a smothering material, but it has a tendency to deteriorate over time. It may blow away if not properly anchored and can be punctured by sharp weed debris left underneath.

More economical choices might be salvaged or recycled wood paneling or industrial-weight tarps. Other suitable materials include newspapers or cardboard covered with leaves or grass clippings. While smothering will eliminate plants, a large weed seed bank may remain.

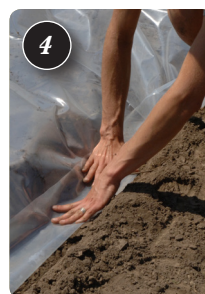
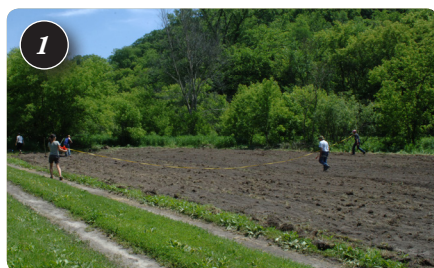
May				June				July				August				September				October			
START SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	EXPOSE TO LIGHT	START SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	EXPOSE TO LIGHT	START SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	EXPOSE TO LIGHT	START SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	SMOTHERING	EXPOSE TO LIGHT	PLANT SEED MIX	PLANT SEED MIX

EXAMPLE: Timed intervals of 4 to 5 weeks "on" and 1 to 2 weeks "off" will allow multiple waves of weed seeds to germinate before being killed during the following cycle of smothering. Some weeds need to be covered for two years. Smothering a lawn takes less time; usually it can be killed in two months by a close mowing before covering.

## SOLARIZATION WITH CLEAR PLASTIC

Solarization is an effective process for removing weedy competition on smaller sites without the use of herbicides. Solarization works by raising the soil temperature enough to kill weed seeds near the soil surface. This process requires about 6 months from start to finish and should begin in the spring.

Mow and rake loose debris from the site early in the spring. Remove any sharp plant material that may puncture or tear plastic. Tilling the site isn't necessary but will simplify the process of burying the edges while providing a prepared bed for seeding.



Starting along one side, bury the edges of the plastic. If there is a little extra you can simply fold the plastic under and bury with soil. Bury and firmly pack the edges to create an airlock which is essential to the heating process. Add weights to the center of your plastic sheet to prevent wind from unseating the airlock. Apply greenhouse repair tape to any rips or holes.



In late summer remove the plastic, before cooler weather begins to set in. Plastic that is left on site into cooler weather will actually promote new growth of bordering rhizomatous weeds and grasses. Hand sow your seed mix over the solarized area as recommended for a dormant fall planting.



Dig a shallow trench around the perimeter of your planting site (hiring or renting a trencher can make quick work of this). Be careful to pile soil on the outside of the site. This will make burying the plastic edges much easier.

Water the area thoroughly if solarizing an untilled site. Position the plastic at one end of your site, making sure to center the material. Be sure to use durable plastic sheeting that is UV-stable, such as greenhouse plastic.