

**All Gardens
Great & Small**
by
York Co.
Horticultural Agent
Tom Becker



Minimum Till Gardening

This is the third article in a monthly series looking at ways of saving and enhancing our garden soils. Tilling your garden correctly preserves the soil and its fertility, enhances the absorption of rainfall, and protects local streams from run-off sediment.

Gardeners often ask: Do I plow or till my garden soil in the spring or fall? Working soil in the fall is far better than spring

plowing. Why? Fall plowing allows earlier spring planting. As a result large amounts of organic matter are turned under in a complete decomposition in the spring.

But, fall plowing is not recommended for hillside or steep garden plots. Soil left exposed all winter, is subject to erosion when spring rains come. Minimum-till gardening is recommended for these areas. Minimum-till gardening uses a

winter cover crop to prevent soil erosion. Till in the fall to prepare the soil for seeding the cover crop. In the spring, turn the cover crop under as a green manure crop.

Spring plowing is also recommended for sandy soils and those where only shallow tilling is practiced. Generally, all gardens require light tilling and cultivation in the spring to kill weeds and smooth the soil for planting.

As an alternative to standard plowing and tilling procedures, minimum-till gardening known as conservation tillage, is ideal when transplanting tomatoes into the vegetable garden. Here are the steps you want to follow:

Step 1. In the fall, prepare the soil for cover crop seeding. Tilling under all summer crop wastes. Remove tomato vines and/or corn stalks to make tilling easier.

Step 2. Plant a cover crop that combines winter rye and hairy vetch (2 lbs. of winter rye

grain and 3/4 lb. of hairy vetch per 1000 square feet). The rye provides a mulching surface for spring planting. Hairy vetch, a legume, contributes beneficial nitrogen to the soil. The vetch seed must be coated with Rhizobium inoculant prior to seeding to insure nodulation with nitrogen-fixing bacteria.

Step 3. In the spring, use a scythe or string-line trimmer to reduce the height of the crop cover. Rake off the extra grass and put to the side of the planting row. Use a lawn mower to finish trimming the cover.

Step 4. A week later, mow the area again. Now the area is ready for planting. Dig a wide hole for each plant, large enough to accommodate for root spread. Pull weeds in the surrounding area including any cover crop roots. Water in the plants or use a water-soluble fertilizer according to the directions on the label. If available, put a quart of compost in the planting hole. Mulch

the entire area between plants with the clippings that were removed the previous week. Leave 6 to 8 inches of space around the base of plants to allow the soil to warm up quickly.

Step 5. Additional mulch hay may be needed for proper weed control. Use grass clippings or shredded leaves saved from the previous fall. If weeds appear, pull them by hand. If hoeing is needed, try to keep the blade from disturbing the transplants.

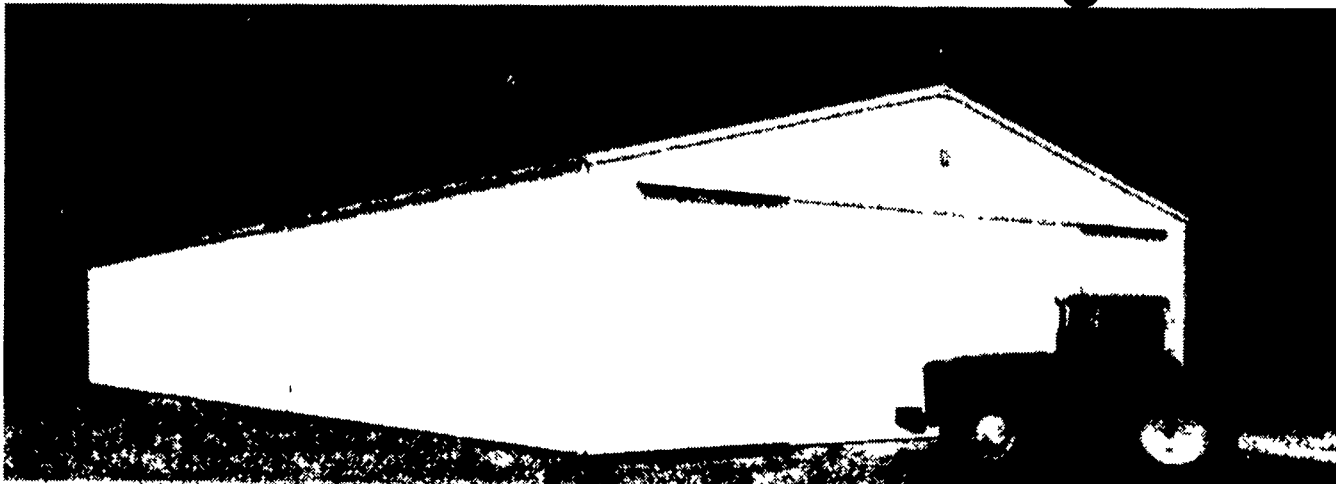
Step 6. Repeat the process the following fall. You may want to experiment with small plots rather than your entire garden.

To learn more about minimum till gardening, ask for USDA publication #FB-229 titled: Sustainable Production of Fresh-Market Tomatoes with Organic Mulches by Aref A. Abdul-Baki.

Any questions concerning this article can be directed to Tom Becker at (717)840-7408.

Information for this article was provided by Diane Relf, extension specialist in consumer horticulture at Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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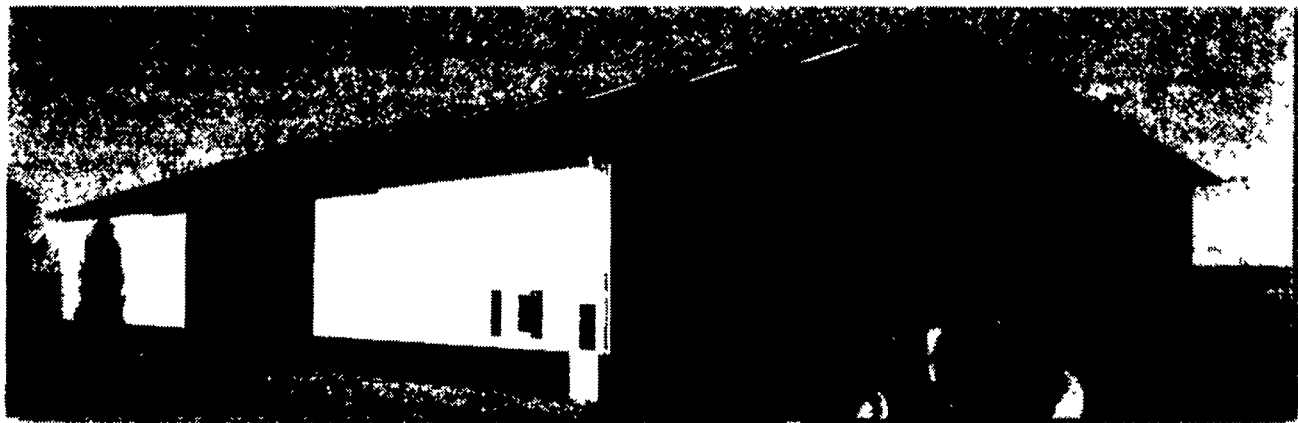


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Horse School Expands

A third farm has joined Grazing Acres and KA Equestrian Center in running a series of Schooling Horse Shows this season.

Meadow Stables of Unionville is the third sponsoring stable for the series, now named the Triangle Series.

Grazing Acres is located in New London and KA Equestrian is located in Cochranville, so series participants can "travel the Triangle" for the nine scheduled shows.

The series begins on Sunday, May 10, at Grazing Acres with Pam Tawes of Chester Springs as judge, runs through the summer, and concludes on November 1 at Fox Meadow.

A year-end banquet will be held following the November 1 show to present season high point awards.

In addition to series-end awards, Championship and Reserve Champion ribbons will be awarded in each division at each show.

New for this season is a three-class Leadline division, open to riders of any age, and a Baby Green division for horses and ponies in their first year of showing. The "money" classes are also being expanded, with cash prizes offered in Pleasure, Low Hunter, and Hunter.

Western classes, which can be difficult to find locally, will continue to be held, and Western riders are also encouraged to show in the Pleasure, Leadline, and equitation divisions.

Call for information Grazing Acres (610)255-5009; KA Equestrian (610)869-0746; Fox Meadow (610)444-8805.



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