

GARBAGE AND RECYCLING

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Gardening - make the mulch of it!

What's one of the secrets to a healthy garden and lush lawn? Try mulch! You don't need a degree in horticulture or bags of store-bought products - good gardeners have been practising mulching for generations. Besides improving the health of soil, recycling grass clippings, leaves, and weeds into mulch also provides an answer to water shortages and overburdened landfills. Mulch is simply a layer of material, organic or inorganic, placed on or around plants, shrubs or trees to cover the soil.

Tips:

- Leave grass clippings on the lawn after mowing to add nutrients, reduce water loss, and eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers. Do not use grass which has been treated with hazardous pesticides or herbicides.
- Annuals, perennials and vegetable seedlings can benefit from a mulch which is moved aside at planting time and then pulled back around the plant as it grows.
- Don't mulch too closely around the trunks of trees (you'll smother the roots), or too closely at the base of heat-loving vegetables and flowers (mulches cool the soil). Mulch trees out to the drip line, which is the outer perimeter of the tree branches.
- Mulches can be an ideal hiding place for insects such as slugs and snails. Remove or turn mulch under during the spring to discourage egg-laying (follow up with biological controls available at garden centres).
- Mulch should be no deeper than 5-7.5 centimetres.(2-3 inches) to ensure circulation of air to soil.
Don't mulch with weeds containing seeds or persistent roots.

Benefits of mulching:

- **Water / moisture conservation** - acts as a sponge to hold water and nutrients close to the soil, and blocks the drying effects of sun and wind to reduce evaporation by more than 70 percent. This encourages healthy plant growth, prevents drying of shallow roots, and makes for less watering. Mulches also attract earthworms that will tunnel through soil providing aeration, which allows for improved water absorption.
- **Weed control** - thick layers can reduce germination and growth of weeds, eliminating need for herbicides.
- **Insulation** - stabilizes soil temperatures, keeping root zones cooler in summer and protects soil from heaving during winter temperature fluctuations. (Apply after ground has frozen.) By covering bare soil, mulch prevents soil compaction and erosion caused by heavy rains and wind.
- **Soil enrichment** - replenishes and enriches the soil as it decomposes, reducing the need for compost, manure, and other fertilizers. Increased organic matter results in less digging, tilling, and cultivation. It improves the soil's fibre content, making sandy soil more water retentive and clay soil more porous; creating an ideal environment for earthworms and micro-organisms essential to healthy soil.
- **Adaptable** - may be selected either for its rapid decomposition, its longevity, or a combination of both. Most natural or organic mulches gradually break down and decompose to add nutrients to the soil and improve texture and drainage. This is helpful in vegetable plots. In ornamental plantings of flowers, shrubs and trees, you may prefer a more decorative and long-lasting mulch.
- **Garden maintenance** - by limiting direct contact with soil and preventing mud from splashing, mulches help keep fruits, flowers and vegetables clean and disease-free, and garden beds neat and attractive.

Type	Features	Best uses	Sources
Bark & shredded wood (hardwood or pine)	Slow to decompose; stays in place; ornamental appearance	Landscaping; around ornamentals; lasts 1 to 2 years or more	Garden centres
Compost	Readily available; can be applied any time; rich in nutrients; will not burn plants; can be used coarse or screened for finer texture	Flower and vegetable beds, shrubs, trees, and lawns; incorporated into soil; as a side or topdressing	Backyard pile or bin; municipal programs; garden centres
Yard or garden refuse	Can be applied any time of year; balances pH levels; also known as sheet composting; may attract pests	Vegetable garden between rows; do not use weeds with mature seeds	Commonly available from yard or garden
Grass clippings	Readily available; decomposes quickly; may heat excessively and mat if layers are thicker than 7 cm (3"); may contain herbicides	Leave on lawn or mix with leaves to use in garden or compost pile	Lawn
Groundcovers and cover crops	Roots hold soil; provides shade and nutrients; adaptable	As an underplanting for companion plants or herbs; lawn alternative; cover crops in garden rotations	Garden centres and nurseries
Hay or straw	Decomposes rapidly; provides insulation; lightweight; not ornamental; uncomposted hay/straw may contain "weed" seeds	Around vegetables (hay should be well composted); around fruit trees or shrubs and berries; entire bale can be used as winter cover for root crops	Stables; farms; garden centres and nurseries
Landscaping fabric	Lasts indefinitely; permeable to water, air, and nutrients while blocking weed growth	Can be cut with sharp knife to plant through, or laid around existing plants	Garden centres and catalogues
Leaf mould	High in minerals; lightweight; should be well rotted	Recommended for wildflowers; oak or beech leaf mould good for flowers or berries needing acidic soil	Can be made in backyard leaf composter
Leaves	Insulator; high in minerals; may mat or blow away if not shredded or composted; many are acidic (rhododendron, pine needles, oak, beech - best used on acid-loving plants like tomatoes and strawberries)	Cools soil in summer; winter cover (apply after dormancy, remove or till into soil in the spring); (see above box on leaf mould)	Commonly available
Composted manure	Should be thoroughly composted; usually combined with bedding straw	Winter protection for bulbs and perennials; enriches soil in spring and summer	Garden centres and nurseries
Newspaper (black/white pages only)	Can be shredded or left flat; excellent weed suppressant	Vegetable beds in pathways; creating new garden beds	Commonly available
Pine needles	Excellent weed suppressant; slow to decompose; retains moisture; acidic	Acid-loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons, blueberries; should be composted first for best use of acidic properties	Pine trees; landscapers
Plastic film (black)	Weed suppressant; can boost yields; allows oxygen through; punch holes to allow water through; can cause roots to concentrate near surface; not compostable or biodegradable	Heat loving vegetables and fruits; between row of fruit trees	Garden centres; catalogues and nurseries
Stone (pebbles or crushed)	Ornamental; retains warmth; hinders cultivation	Around ornamentals; pathways; permanent plantings	Garden centres; nurseries