

# Sheet Mulching



## What's sheet mulching?

Sheet mulching is a way to convert lawn to another type of landscaping without using pesticides or digging up the whole area. It smothers the existing plants, adds organic matter to the soil, and makes the site ready for other uses.



## Installation

- 1. Prepare the site.** Mow the area at your mower's lowest setting. Soak the area before starting to begin decomposition.
- 2. Prevent erosion.** If the lawn is against pavement, use a flat-edged shovel to dig the lawn 8"-12" back from pavement and about 3" below pavement. Soil and turf can be left on other portions of the sheet mulched area.
- 3. Add large plants.** Any 5-gallon or larger plants, such as shrubs and fruit trees, are planted with compost.
- 4. Add a weed barrier.** Wet brown cardboard and remove any staples, tape, and labels. Lay the cardboard over the entire area to prevent grass or weed growth. Keep cardboard 1" from the base of the larger plants to prevent rot. Overlap the edges by several inches so the weeds don't get through.
- 5. Add small plants.** Cut holes in the cardboard just large enough to add the plants. Surround the base of the plants with compost.
- 6. Mulch.** Add a 2" layer of mulch on top of the cardboard. This helps optimizing water retention.
- 7. Maintain.** Check plants often and water when necessary. Ensure materials such as mulch are not piling up around the base of new plants. If needed, consider adding temporary netting or fencing so plants can establish without animal grazing.

## Variations

**Borders:** To gradually reduce the size of your lawn, sheet mulch your lawn at the edge of your gardens to increase their size. Repeat as many years as desired to build out your gardens.

**Weed Killing:** Have a large weed patch? Instead of pulling them by hand or spraying with pesticides, smother the area with several layers of overlapping cardboard and then cover with compost and revegetate the area with your desired plant, whether it's grass seed, vegetable seeds, or flower seeds.

**Garden Beds:** In late fall, lay wet cardboard down on garden beds with annual plants (like vegetable gardens) and layer compost with leaves or straw on top to kill any weeds and help build up your soil and have it ready for spring!

**Walkways:** Lay down multiple layers of wet cardboard and cover with 3-4" of wood chips around raised beds and similar structures to stabilize bare soil.

**Invasive Plants:** To manage invasive plants like Japanese Knotweed, a more intensive method of sheet mulching can be used. First, cut the invasive plant down to the ground. Pile 3"-4" of wood chips on top of the site and go at least 1' beyond the patch of invasive plant stems. Cover the chips with 7 mm nonwoven geotextile fabric. Overlap any fabric edges by several inches. Pile 3"-4" of wood chips on top of the fabric. Monitor the site for any regrowth and cut regrowth as it appears.