



# DIY FOR 2010



## How to Mulch Your Garden:

Mulching is one of the easiest and most beneficial steps you can take to preserve the health of your garden and improve the efficiency of your watering. Mulch protects and enhances soil, creates a barrier for weed growth, acts as an insulator during the winter, and traps in the soil moisture so you will not have to water your garden as often. Thicker mulches can reduce water use by up to 50%, saving money on your utility bill.

Mulch comes in 2 forms: organic and inorganic.

**Organic materials:** Organic mulch improves and enriches the soil as it slowly decomposed and released nutrients into the soil. This process keeps the soil loose and benefits root growth and water infiltration.

***Examples:*** compost, grass clippings, straw, hay, or bark chips.

**Inorganic materials:** This type of mulch does not enrich the soil. It is much more permanent and difficult to remove once applied.

***Examples:*** stones, brick chips or plastic.

*Unless you have a particular reason to select inorganic mulch, it is best to use an organic mulch material.*

### **What you will need:**

1. Mulching material of your choice
2. Shovel
3. Rake
4. Optional: Newspaper



## Directions:

1. Determine how much mulch you will need by measuring the size of the area you will cover. Mulch is measured in ft<sup>3</sup>, so don't forget to measure the desired depth of your mulch.
2. Choose a mulching material that is appropriate for the job. Answer a few questions to determine the best material for your garden because each material has different qualities that will best serve different environments.
  - a. Purpose: Weed control? Maintaining moisture?
  - b. Determine what material is readily available: Do you have grass clippings or leaves? Or, would you rather purchase mulch?
  - c. Determine what level of biodegradation you want: Do you want to have a material that is rapidly decomposing and enriching the soil? Do you want one that decomposes at a slower rate, meaning you will not need to reapply it as often?
  - d. Determine what appearance you want your garden to have.
3. Prepare the area that you plan to mulch by removing any weeds. If you like, add a compost layer before you apply the mulch layer.
4. Optional Step: Lay newspaper under a layer of organic mulch to add extra protection against weeds. To do this, lay 4-8 sheets of moist newspaper over your exposed soil. Be careful not to cover any areas where you want to have growth because newspaper blocks solar energy, making it difficult for plants to grow.
5. Use a shovel to pile the mulch onto the soil and use a rake to spread it out evenly. The chart below will help you determine the appropriate depth of your mulch layer. Leave a 1-inch diameter around the base of the plants. This is an important step because if your mulch or newspaper layer is touching the base of the plant, it will trap too much moisture and cause it to rot.



**Note:** Organic mulches will slowly decompose and add nutrients to the soil. Depending on how quickly your mulch decomposes, add an additional 1-2" of mulch to maintain this even layer.

| Material        | Amount to Apply | Notes  |
|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| Bark mulch      | 2-4 inches      | Smaller chips are easier to spread, especially around small plants. Best to use around trees, shrubs, and perennial gardens.     |
| Wood chips      | 2-4 inches      | Similar to bark mulch; if you use fresh wood chips that are mixed with leaves, you will probably want to add a layer of compost. |
| Leaves          | 3-4 inches      | Add compost before spreading the leaves; if you are using dry leaves, apply about 6 inches.                                      |
| Grass clippings | 2-3 inches      | Thicker layers will compost and rot, becoming smelly. Add additional layers as clippings decompose.                              |
| Newspaper       | ¼ inch          | Apply sheets of newspaper and cover lightly with grass clippings or other mulch material.  |
| Compost         | 3-4 inches      | An excellent material for enriching soil.  |

