

Mulching 101



Solano County
Water Agency

What is mulch?

Mulch is any material that is laid over the surface of soil

What is sheet mulching?

Sheet mulching involves using organic materials, such as bark, lawn clippings, or leaves to help kick start the decomposition of a lawn area. Instead of manually removing lawn, sheet mulching allows the lawn to decompose, while also maintaining soil integrity.

What are the benefits of sheet mulching?

Sheet mulching is an affordable and eco-friendly alternative to turf conversion. Sheet mulching helps improve soil and microbiota found in the soil itself.

Materials

- hose
- shovel
- gardening gloves
- compost
- cardboard
- friends to help you with your project!
- cardboard (rolled or recycled)
- mulch
- tape measurer

Additional Resources

Mulch Calculation:

Digital Calculation tool
<https://www.lawntogarden.org/materials-calculator>

Area in square feet x Depth in feet = Volume in cubic feet
Volume in cubic feet ÷ 27 = Volume in cubic yards

Plant Resources:

<https://www.solano.watersavingplants.com/plants.php>



12 Steps to Sheet Mulching

2



1. Prep your lawn

Mow your lawn and leave the trimmings on the ground



2. Plant large plants first (5 gallons and above)

Make sure to line your plants with compost and not mulch. Mulch should be away from the base of the plant



3. Measure your lawn

Measuring your site will help you figure out how much compost and mulch you will need.

4. Edge your lawn



If your lawn is adjacent to any paved area, the sheet mulch could spill onto surrounding pavement. To avoid this, you can edge your lawn.

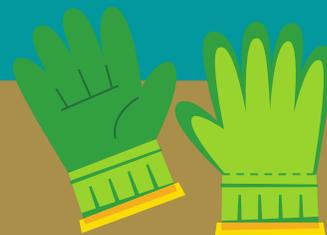
To edge your lawn:

- Be aware of irrigation pipes
- Take your shovel and dig at a 45-degree angle trench about 8-12 inches away from the concrete edge
- Make sure to dig the trench at least three inches below the concrete, but ideally, they should be about 4-6 inches deep



5. What to do with leftover sod

- You can create mounds and small berms with the leftover plant matter created from digging your edges
- Make sure to flip the edges over so that the roots face upwards

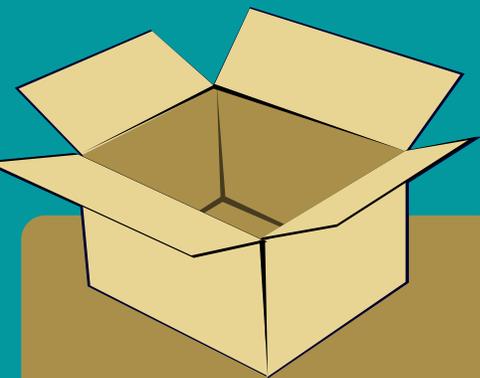


6. Remove any invasive species

- Remove plants by hand pulling or using a shovel
- Avoid herbicides as they can harm insects

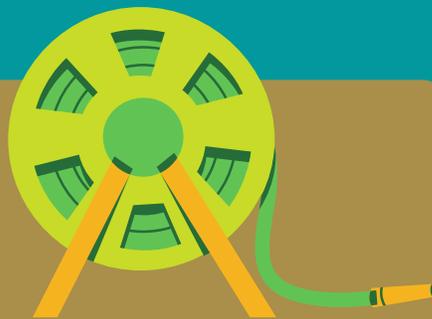


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7. Select a weed blocker

- Preferably, use rolled or recycled cardboard (non-waxy kind)
- Avoid non-permeable materials or plastic barriers



8. Arrange the cardboard

- Make space for plants that you plan to keep, do not cover them with weed blocker
- If using cardboard, place cardboard down over grassy area, making sure to overlap the cardboard 6-8 inches. This help reduce the occurrence of weeds
- The cardboard will disintegrate and help improve your soil, while suppressing weeds
- Cover all grassy areas that you plan on converting and mulching

IMPORTANT!

- **Spray cardboard with hose to help accelerate the decomposition of the material**



9. Add a compost layer

- spread about an inch to an inch and a half of compost on top of the cardboard layer



10. Add a mulch layer

- Spread about three inches of mulch on top of the compost layer
- Mulch should be composed of natural materials, such as plant matter/debris, wood chips, etc.



11. Plant native and plant for pollinators

- Cut directly into the cardboard to add smaller plants into your lawn area
- Keep mulch away from the crown of plants and tree trunks
- Make sure to select climate appropriate plants, preferably native to your locale.
- Include some nectar plants that encourage pollinators like bees, butterflies, and birds



12. Maintain your garden

- Avoid using harmful pesticides. Hand pull weeds that may come up around the edging of your lawn. If you see too many weeds, you may need to replace cardboard in some areas
- Check on newly transferred plants, especially young plants that may require extra attention