



Mariposa Naturescapes, LLC

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SHEET MULCHING TIPS

Why Sheet Mulch?

- Improve nutrient and water retention in the soil
- Encourage favorable soil microbial activity and worms
- Suppress weed growth and cultivate plant vigor & resistance to pests and diseases

How to Sheet Mulch...

Step 1: JUMP START LAYER (Can Be Skipped if Short on Time, Energy, and/or Money)

--Do a soil test of current pH level, and nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (nutrients) of your sheet mulch area. Here's a link to learn more about soil testing:

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/toxic/ResidentTesting.aspx>.

- Knock down tall weeds and woody plants in sheet mulch area
- Using a sturdy garden fork, fork the ground every foot or so to aerate the soil
- Soak ground with water
- Spread some organic, natural materials high in nitrogen to "jump start" microbial activity (especially if nitrogen is lacking): compost, chicken manure, worm castings, soluble fungi...how much/what is added depends upon current soil state and what you plan to grow
- Add pH adjusting materials and/or natural products for potassium and phosphorus, if appropriate (Call GARDEN HOTLINE as a resource for this - 206.633.0224)
- Soak the area well with water after the amendments are spread over the area

Step 2: WEED/GRASS BARRIER

Underneath this weed barrier grasses/weeds die become food for earthworms that turn and aerate the soil. Barrier is needed only for establishment of mulch and disappears with time.

- Lay barrier material(s): 6 - 8 sheets of black & white newspaper, 1 - 2 layers of cardboard or burlap bags, etc. in an overlapping fashion where the pieces of the material *completely cover the ground without any breaks*, except around plants you want to "save". Leave a generous opening for air circulation - start barrier out 4" - 12" from plant trunk(s), depending upon plant's size (you want water to be able to get to plants' root zone)
- Wet barrier materials thoroughly with a garden hose before adding compost layer

Step 3: COMPOST LAYER

--Lay 2 - 3" of aged compost (i.e., Cedar Grove) - this layer is on top of the weed barrier. This decomposed organic matter feeds nutrients to plants and holds water in the soil.

Step 4: MULCH LAYER

The top dressing of mulch mimics the newly fallen organic matter of the forest. Choose weed-free, aesthetically pleasing materials to help keep moisture in soil, slow soil erosion, and deter weeds.

- Add 2" - 3" of material you want for your finished look - arborist wood chips, straw (not hay), aged bark, fertile mulch (sawdust/aged steer manure). The top layer will slowly decompose into lower layers and needs replaced periodically - annually in early spring, after soil has warmed up a bit, works well in Seattle area.