

MULCHING THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

MULCH refers to a material placed on the soil surface.

SOIL AMENDMENT refers to any material mixed into a soil.

Benefits of Mulch

- Reduces moisture evaporation so cuts water use 25-50%.
- Organic mulches promote beneficial activity of soil microorganisms which improves soil tilth (suitability of soil to support plant growth).
- Stabilizes soil moisture (improves efficiency of irrigation).
- Reduces soil compaction forces from rain, overhead watering, foot traffic.
- Helps control weeds.
- Moderates (cools/warms) soil temperatures.
- Helps roots thrive.
- Creates splash barrier against soil and plant debris pathogens in soil.

Types of Mulch for the Vegetable Garden

- Grass clippings - layer up to 1/4 inch thick; allow each layer to dry; do not use from lawns treated with herbicides in the past month.
- Compost -use plant material based; no animal manures.
- Newspaper - use 1-2 sheets covered with another mulch or wind will blow away or use shredded. Do not use glossy print materials.
- Black plastic - use to warm soils in spring; undesirable for cool-season vegetables (overheats soil). Use clear plastic to pre-sprout weeds.
- Straw - certified weed-free; not recommended in windy area unless secured; best to chop into smaller pieces.
- Wood/bark chips - do not use in vegetable gardens; great for trees, shrubs, perennials.

Guidelines

- Apply 2-3 inches deep, on average.
- Keep materials about 1 inch away from stems and leaves.
- All but plastic may be turned into the soil in the fall.