



## **Sheet Mulching A Quick Guide to Getting Started**

The key to a healthy, productive landscape or garden is the soil; you want to have soil that is diverse and full of microorganisms. Sheet mulching is a clever way to kill off grass or other plants to make way for habitat at home.

While it takes some time, sheet mulching requires a minimum amount of labor, and the rewards are more than worth the effort.



### **What is Sheet Mulching?**

Sheet mulching is a passive method of composting. Instead of composting in a bin or tumbler and then transferring the compost, you do it on the site where you want to enrich the earth.

Even though it does not take a lot of active work, it takes time. Compost happens, but you must be patient for everything to decompose. In the end, you will have enriched soil and a bountiful harvest.

### **Where to Use Sheet Mulching**

You can use sheet mulching to create new and fertile gardening areas. If you want to turn your lawn, then layering compostable materials to decompose in place gets the job done because not only does it help add nutrients to your soil, but it also helps to suppress weeds or grass.

Additionally, you can use sheet mulching to trap moisture in the ground in areas that could use a little help. Moisture is a plus when it comes to mulching because it reduces the need for irrigation. Sheet mulching also creates a good environment for the earthworms in the ground. Worms love cardboard and compost. They like to munch on it, pooping out extra nutrients. So consider sheet mulching established landscaping as well.

You can also use sheet mulching to prep an existing space for next year's crops in your garden.

### **When to Start Sheet Mulching**

Compost was not built in a day, which is why sheet mulching needs to be done months in advance. You should not be able to recognize any of the materials you are using in your compost by the time you're ready to plant.

Since decomposition takes time, it is best to start sheet composting in the area in the fall before you want to grow in that area. Plan for it to take six months or longer to decompose.

### **How to Start Sheet Mulching**

#### 1. Gather the Right Materials

You have some creative freedom when it comes to what materials you use, and the quantity needed will depend on how big of a space you want to cover. Some of those materials you might want to use are:

- Corrugated cardboard boxes
- Newspapers
- Finished organic compost (such as Tagro, Cedar Grove compost, etc.)

Other materials that you can include (in small amounts):

- Lawn clippings
- Shredded leaves
- Shredded plant trimmings
- Coffee grounds
- Tea leaves
- Straw bales

#### 2. Prepare the Area

Cut the plants and/or grass down to the ground then water the area that you want to cover. Do not remove the vegetation in the area because it acts as food for decomposers. You should, however, remove woody stumps or large pieces that will not decompose in time for the spring.

Use a rake or fork to break up the area if its compacted or if you have clay soil. Rock the spade back and forth to open holes in the ground. Ideally, you do not want to turn the soil because it disrupts the natural ecology; you just want to open it up.

### 3. Put Down the First Materials

Put a thin (1") layer of nitrogen-rich materials over the area. Great options are fresh grass clippings or finished compost. By adding nitrogen-rich materials, you are encouraging earthworms, beetles, and other invertebrates.

### 5. Lay Down the Cardboard

Cover the area with overlapping layer of cardboard or newspaper. Make sure not to use any glossy paper and remove any staples or tape. You want to create a layer that blocks the light to smother out weeds.

Now, add a layer of finished compost or more nitrogen-rich materials over the top of the newspapers.

\*Make sure you wet the materials as you build up the sheet mulch. At the end wet the cardboard until it become heavy and limp so it does not shift or blow away.

### 6. Add Carbon-Rich Materials

Now, it is time to add carbon-rich materials in a layer up to six inches deep. You can use a variety of carbon items, such as fresh or soiled straw, shredded leaves, or chipped bark/mulch.

