

by Arti Kirch
Markham Arboretum, Concord CA



Mulching for the Home Garden

What's in this Presentation

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Mulch Defined

- Mulch is any material that a gardener places on the soil to protect it.
 - Wood/straw: recommended
 - Low cost or free
 - Enriches soil
 - Stone
 - Hot surface
 - Most suitable for desert-landscape plants
 - Synthetic
 - Degrades quickly into messy bits
 - Not very effective weed barrier
 - Can interfere with drainage

Benefits of Mulch

- Suppresses **weed** growth
- Moderates the **temperature** of the soil
- Conserves soil **moisture** by reducing evaporation
- Keeps plant parts from touching the soil which can help **reduce diseases** and plant decay
- Helps decrease **erosion**
- Can enhance the **visual appeal** of your garden
- And more!



Sheet mulching: Timing

- **Mid-winter:** add to established areas
 - Can often delay watering plants for several weeks as the weather warms
- **Spring:** start adding mulch for new areas
 - Many seeds require warmer soil temperatures in order to germinate
- **Summer:** add as needed to protect soil
 - Mulch will decompose and reduce in thickness, just in time to take advantage of the mid-fall rains
- **Fall / early winter:** allow mulch to continue to decompose as winter rains increase. Plants need good drainage during these months.

Sheet mulching: Materials

- **Cardboard**

- Corrugated (not shiny)
 - No tape or staples
- Costco 3' x 3' pallet dividers

- **Wood chips**

- More wood than leaves/grass
- Calculate: Example for covering a space with 2 inches of wood chips
 - 20' (long) x 30' (wide) = 600 square feet
 - 600 (square feet) x 2 (inches) / 324 * = 4 cubic yards (rounded to the nearest whole number)

* 1 cubic yard of mulch covers 324 square feet 1 inch deep

Sheet mulching: Process

- Mow or cut lawn, weeds, or other vegetation to the ground
- If soil has already dried, water the whole area thoroughly
 - Need moisture in soil for vegetation that remains and water helps start decomposition
- Lay down cardboard, overlapping 4"-6"
- Spread wood chips



Mulching: Tidbits, Myths

- **Eucalyptus or Pine chips are toxic:** While alive, these trees exude compounds that retard the growth of other nearby plants. But those compounds quickly dissipate when the tree is killed/chipped.
- **How long does the mulch last:** wood chips have the advantage of breaking down slowly, over several years. However, you might find that some spots get bare or thin so you might be adding as you need
- **Chips attract termite:** Termites need solid, dark, protected pieces of wood (like the framing of your house). Wood chips do not appeal to them.
- **Mulching container plants:** totally OK, but remember to keep the mulch away from the plant stem, just as you need to do if the mulch is on the ground