



Sheet Mulching

What is it?

Sheet mulching (sometimes called lasagna gardening) is a method that eliminates weeds or sod while revitalizing your soil. It's a permaculture technique that mimics the natural conditions found on the forest floor where layers of fallen leaves and other vegetative material create rich forest 'duff'. Fall is the perfect time to think about sheet mulching so the material can break down over the winter and be ready for spring planting.

We recommend two methods of sheet mulching - the basic method, which is simpler and suitable for large sites, and the ultimate method when you would like to create high-quality soil or have lots of raw, compostable materials at home.



The Basic Method

1. Begin by mowing grass or weeds down to the nub. Dig out and remove any persistent weeds like blackberry or bindweed (morning glory). Also, dig a small trench, approximately 4in. wide and deep, in the grass around the entire perimeter of the new bed.
2. Cover the ground with cardboard, making sure to overlap the edges by at least six inches. Newspaper or painter's paper (1/4-1/2" thick) also works well for grass, but not weeds. If you're doing this during the dry season or you would like to plant immediately, generously wet the paper or cardboard.
3. Apply two to four inches of high-quality compost.
4. Cover with four to six inches of woody mulch, straw or arborist's chips.
5. If you are planting at the same time, prepare the planting hole by raking aside the mulch, and cutting away a circle of paper or cardboard. Plant and backfill with native soil, and replace the mulch.
6. For long-term maintenance, replenish the mulch layer as needed to suppress weeds and prevent erosion.



The Ultimate Method *(Adapted from Toby Hemenway.)*

1. The day before you mulch, moisten the ground well, unless it is already wet from rain.
2. Mow the grass or weeds on the day of sheet mulching, but leave them in place to decompose. Also, dig a small trench, approximately 4in. wide and deep, in the grass around the entire perimeter of the new bed.
3. Add any necessary soil amendments. In the Pacific Northwest, soils tend to be acidic so lime is frequently used to adjust the pH. If you are unsure, take a soil test and amend accordingly.
4. If your soil is clay or very compacted, use a spading fork or aerator to poke some holes in the ground across the entire site. This will allow better moisture absorption and aeration.
5. Add a thin layer of high-nitrogen material. This could be manure (chicken manure is very high in nitrogen) blood meal, or fresh grass clippings. This layer isn't essential, but brings up more worms and microorganisms.
6. Lay down newspaper (one-fourth to one-half inch thick), or a layer of cardboard. Boxes from bicycles or appliances will cover the ground fast. Overlap these barriers by at least six inches to eliminate weeds from coming through the cracks. Wet the paper or cardboard well.
7. Apply another thin layer of nitrogen-rich manure, blood meal or fresh grass clippings.
8. Cover with eight to twelve inches of bulk mulch - including loose straw, hay, or stable bedding. As you build this layer, water thoroughly.
9. Add 1 to 2 inches of compost. If the pile has a few months to compost before planting, you can use manure.
10. The final layer to add will be two inches of weed-free wood mulch or straw.



Your lasagna garden is complete!

Let the sheet mulch work its magic and within a few months you will have pliable, nutrient-rich soil that will astonish you with its results. Nature will really be doing the work, but you can take the credit. Be careful though, you may have to make this lasagna for all of your neighbors.

Questions?

The Snohomish Conservation District's Community Conservation Team can assist you with questions. Email ccteam@snohomishcd.org or call 425-335-5634.