

Mulching Checklist

By Tara Schatz

☐ Plastic

- ☐ Black and red plastic mulch will increase the soil temperature, allowing you to plant summer crops earlier.
- ☐ Many soil-borne diseases can be greatly reduced or even eliminated by using plastic mulch.
- ☐ Weeds are reduced and crops often see an increased rate of growth compared with bare soil Specifically, cucumbers, squash, melons, tomatoes, egg-plants, and peppers do very well when planted over a plastic mulch.
- ☐ Because water can't permeate the plastic, you will have to water your garden with a drip irrigation system or soaker hoses that are placed under the plastic.
- ☐ Expensive, difficult to remove, and not environmentally sustainable.
- ☐ Not as attractive as natural mulches.

☐ Wood Chips

- ☐ Look lovely, last a long time, and are relatively inexpensive Because they last so long, they are a good choice for walkways and perennial beds.
- ☐ Do a good job suppressing weeds, but you should make sure you cover your planting beds with a covering of mulch that is at least three inches deep.
- ☐ Great at retaining moisture and keeping the soil temperature stable, but are less effective than plastic at preventing soil-borne diseases.
- ☐ As they break down, nitrogen is depleted from the top layer of soil, which means you may have to fertilize more often.
- ☐ Not the best choice for vegetable gardens because you will have to remove the mulch before putting in a new crop.

☐ Pine Needles

- ☐ Last even longer than wood chips.
- ☐ Great for controlling moisture and deterring insect pests.
- ☐ Great for acid-loving plants like evergreens, hydrangeas, blueberry bushes, strawberries, and fruit trees They are acidic and therefore will lower your garden's pH over time
- ☐ A bit wispy, so require a thick layer to keep them in place and suppress weeds.

☐ Straw

- ☐ In most areas straw is easy to find and very inexpensive.
- ☐ Is not the most attractive mulch, but is great for a backyard vegetable garden.
- ☐ Regulates moisture and keeps temperatures even.
- ☐ A thick layer will suppress weeds Be careful as some contain seeds that will sprout and grow in your garden.
- ☐ Quite desirable to rodents, slugs, and snails If these pests are a problem in your garden, straw might not be for you.