

# 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, eggplants, 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.