



**ACHIEVE**  
ACTION COMMUNITIES FOR  
HEALTH, INNOVATION &  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

## Summit Achieve Community Garden

### ORGANIC GARDEN MULCH

#### REASONS TO MULCH

- Reduce weed germination and provide barrier to emerging weeds
- Maintain uniform moisture conditions by reducing evaporation
- Decrease impact of heavy rainfall, e.g., puddling, splashing of soil onto vegetables; allows slow, steady water filtration
- Organic mulches protect roots by acting as insulation from extreme heat
- Organic mulches add nutrients and humus to the soils as they decompose, improving its tilth and moisture-holding capacity

#### RECOMMENDED ORGANIC MULCHES

1. Leaves (partially decomposed or shredded)
  - 2" - 3" layer after compaction
  - Reapply as needed to maintain 2" - 3"
  - Shred with shredder or lawnmower
  - Improves soil structure as decomposes
  - Attractive mulch
  - Must add nitrogen fertilizer as mulch decomposes; micro-organisms take nitrogen from soil as decomposing leaves
2. Grass clippings
  - 2" layer
  - Dry grass completely before applying
  - Add gradually to reach 2"
  - Reapply throughout season to maintain 2"
  - Do not use if lawn has been chemically treated that season
  - Avoid crab grass and grass full of seed heads
  - Excellent source of nitrogen as decomposes
3. Hay or Straw
  - 6" - 8" layer
  - Decomposes quickly; must be replenished
  - Avoid hay full of weeds and brambles
  - Improves soil structure as decomposes
  - Alfalfa hay, if available, is recommended; high in nitrogen and other nutrients
  - For all other types of hay and straw, must add nitrogen fertilizer as mulch decomposes; micro-organisms take nitrogen from soil while decomposing hay/straw

#### 4. Newspaper and cardboard

- 2 - 4 layers of newspaper provides good mulch when wetted and covered with organic mulch
- Reapply throughout the season as paper decomposes
- Newspaper with colored ink not allowed in SACG; may contain heavy metals
- Cardboard is an excellent mulch; cover 1 layer with organic mulch to prevent blowing away

#### **NOT RECOMMENDED OR NOT ALLOWED ORGANIC MULCHES**

##### 1. Peat moss -- Not recommended

- 2" - 3" layer
- Provides only fair weed control
- May form surface crust
- Difficult to wet; blows away when dry
- Not sustainable -- slowly renewable; mining is source of atmospheric carbon

##### 2. Wood chips and pine needles -- **Not allowed in SACG garden plots**

- Slow to decay and not recommended for vegetable gardens

##### 3. Sawdust -- Depletes nitrogen from soil

#### **PLASTIC MULCHES**

- Clear plastic is ineffective weed control
- Black plastic provides total weed control
- Black plastic may cause soil temperature to rise too much in mid-summer, damaging roots, unless covered with a good layer of organic mulch to prevent direct absorption of sunlight
- Cool weather crops, such as greens and broccoli, don't grow well in the heat produced by plastic mulch
- Must constantly monitor adequacy of soil moisture
- Does not feed or improve soil

#### **WHEN TO APPLY MULCH**

- Plants are at least 5" tall
  
- Organic mulch
  - apply when soil temperature reaches a minimum of 73 degrees, but before outdoor temperature reaches high 80s
  
- Plastic mulch -- apply in spring or early summer