

Sheet-Mulching Basics

Sheet mulching is a wonderful low cost and low tech method for controlling weeds. It can be used in planting areas, pathways, and even on top of existing vegetation. It basically consists of a layer of cardboard or newspaper topped with a thick layer of mulch, usually wood chips. This combination effectively smothers most weeds and grasses, and inhibits germination of weed seeds. You can plant directly into sheet-mulching to establish your new drought-tolerant garden.

Tips for effective sheet-mulching:

- Only use in areas that are flat or gently sloped. Ideally, ground is fairly uniform and smooth.
- Cut or flatten any existing vegetation, but no need to dig it out.
If the area will soon be planted, and it's in your budget, spread a thin layer of good organic compost over the weeds and water thoroughly to start the decomposition process.
- Completely cover the ground with flattened cardboard boxes or full sheets of newspaper 6 – 8 sheets thick.
- Overlap the sections or pieces by 8 – 10 inches. Leave no gaps!
- Extend the edges of the covered area 8 – 10 inches beyond the weeds.
- You can use rocks or logs to keep everything in place while you are working, or you can pre-wet the cardboard or newspaper so it will stay in place.
- Apply a THICK layer of mulch – 4-6 inches. Wood chips from tree trimming companies are great and free, but other materials may be used.
- To plant into your sheet-mulched area, simply scrape aside the mulch and cut a hole in the cardboard to dig your planting hole. Leave a clear space around the stem of your plants to protect them from damage by chewing bugs.

The sheet mulching can be left in place indefinitely. The cardboard/newspaper and woodchip mulch material will break down over time, so you will need to renew the top layer of mulch as needed to continue to suppress weeds.

