



city of santa barbara Water Conservation Program

Sheet Mulching from the Ground Up

Use sheet mulching to remove lawn or transform weedy patches into rich, fertile ground with no chemicals.

Here is a recipe for applying sheet mulch to remove lawn or weeds and develop healthy soil. This method will kill the lawn and weeds and have the soil teeming with life within a few months. Nature will leverage your effort and create deep, fertile ground beneath the sheet mulch.

Good soil means healthy plants that can fight off many diseases and pests, which can reduce the need for fungicides and pesticides, and means less work for you! Follow these steps and enjoy healthy soil:

1. Remove turf at least 12"–24" from all hard surfaces and buildings to a depth of 6"-10" and flag sprinkler heads. If your goal is to remove warm season turf you must physically remove it as completely as possible. Cool season turf can be left in place.
2. Water the existing soil well the night before.
3. Poke holes in the soil with a spade fork, then apply compost tea, worm castings or a thin layer of other high nitrogen material to attract worms and beneficial insects.
4. Next you will be layering materials to create "lasagna soil layers." See Figure 1 on reverse side.
5. Roll out newspaper, cardboard or painters' paper. Be sure to overlap edges by at least 6". Water down the paper; try not to walk on it.
6. Layer high nitrogen material about 1" thick. You can use fresh grass clippings or a thin layer of manure to entice worms through the decomposing sheet mulch layer.
7. Lay down 8"-12" inches of bulk material, such as hay, wood shavings, mulch or straw. For best composting, add a bit of high nitrogen material to this layer. As you build this layer, spray on water to make it damp, not wet.
8. Add 1"-2" of compost or soil (no manure, it will introduce seeds).
9. Add 1"-2" of straw, fine bark, wood shavings or mulch for the final layer. See reverse side for figures of "lasagna soil layers."

You can plant directly through the "lasagna soil layers" or you can let this "cook" for 6 -8 months to allow the original plant material to decompose. Granted, this whole process is a bit of work and requires a large amount of material. It's an investment of sorts. After setting the stage, millions of microbes and colonies of worms will start to aerate the soil and break down the organic matter into healthy, living soil!



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Figure 1 - "Lasagna Soil Layers"



Figure 2

Bombproof Sheet Mulch

As described by Toby Hemenway in *Gaia's Garden*



Image of "Lasagna Soil Layers"

