

Sheet Mulching Basics

WSU Native Plant Salvage Project



1. Decide how much lawn you want to remove.
2. Collect lots of cardboard! You can remove packaging tape before or wait until the soil pushes it up later on, which is much easier.
3. Place a layer of cardboard over the ground in the shape of your desired planting bed.
4. Use multiple (4-6) layers of cardboard, overlapping at the open seams. (You can use fewer layers, but be prepared for weeds later on.)
5. Cover the layered cardboard with 4-8 inches of arborists' wood chips¹. More chips (e.g. 12 inches or more) are great for areas that will sheet mulch longer or when covering tough weeds such as reed-canary grass or English ivy.
6. Relax and wait. How long? Sheet mulching usually take six months to a year depending on the season, rainfall and what lies beneath! If you sheet mulch in late winter or early spring, you'll avoid a whole season of mowing and might be able to plant by late fall — a great time for planting.

¹Great mulch comes free from professional arborists. After pruning or tree removal, arborists chip the branches and will deliver these to your home. Arborists' chips come naturally complete with beneficial mycorrhizae — an important mutualistic association between a plant and a fungus.

Spot Sheet Mulching Basics



- 1.** When you want to get a project underway quickly, you can sheet mulch around planted plants. This is an especially helpful technique for getting trees and large shrubs established, and then returning later to fill the open spaces with small shrubs and ground covers.



- 2.** Using a spade or pick-axe, remove the grass/weeds growing around the root zone of the plant — at least 18-24 inches in diameter outside the planting hole.



- 3.** Cover the grass and ground around the planted plants with a few layers of overlapping cardboard. Leave an opening around the plant stem. Space trees and large shrubs 6-15 feet apart, and sheet mulch between them.



- 4.** Cover all the cardboard with arborists' wood chips 4-8 inches thick.

Sheet Mulching on a Hill



Follow the same procedure as basic sheet mulching, except secure layers of burlap sacks to the ground using metal ground staples available from hardware stores or garden centers.

Burlap will not slide down the hill like cardboard, and it provides a rough surface for the woodchips to adhere to.

Be sure to layer the sacks adequately to avoid gaps and holes in the fabric.

Make sure you get sacks made entirely of burlap or coir, which will decompose over time in your soil. The best sources are coffee bean bags from local coffee roasters.



Burlap sacks generally take longer to decompose than cardboard, so you may have to wait longer to plant or be prepared to cut away the burlap from your planting hole.