

Make Your Own Mulch

A well-mulched garden can yield 50 percent more vegetables than an unmulched garden of the same size. There are also a number of ways to make your own mulch for much cheaper than buying it.

Old fish bones The Lenape use fish bones to both mulch and fertilize their soil. When used as a fertilizer, it is an excellent natural source of phosphorus, calcium, nitrogen, essential minerals and trace elements.

Branches, Bark and Pine Needles - No more than a four-inch layer over your soil. Feed these through a wood chipper. These machines make short work of almost any yard debris, turning what would be pure waste into free, easy to make mulch.

Leaves Chop these up. You can use a lawn mower or some hedge trimmers. Spread your leaves out into a pile that is no more than two inches thick. Turn on your lawn mower and run over the pile a few times to shred the leaves up into pieces. If you've opted to use hedge trimmers, make sure your leaf pieces are about the size of a dime. You can combine your leaves with your homemade wood mulch, add it with grass clippings or you can leave it on its own.

Grass clippings Make sure that your grass is pesticide free! Never use wet or damp grass as mulch because it has a tendency to reduce the amount of oxygen and soil from getting into the soil. Leave your clippings out in the sun to dry out anywhere from a week to a day. Sprinkle a one-inch layer of clippings over your topsoil.

Newspaper A layer of four to eight sheets of newspapers will work as effectively as mulch. Rip the paper slightly so that your pieces can wrap around the base of your plant. Moisten the sheets when to ensure they stick in place. Top them off with a one to three inch layer of grass clippings, straw or compost to prevent them from drying out. Don't use newspapers that are older than 1990. They are known to contain harmful chemicals like cadmium, lead and chromium.

Compost Your compost should be aged if you plan on using it as a mulch. It should feel like a dark earthy substance instead of rotten trash. This option is likely the most straightforward. You can make your compost into mulch by scattering a layer over your soil that is two to four inches thick.

Straw Use a shovel to break it up into pieces. Place the straw on your soil with no more than a three to six inch layer in between your plant rows. Keep your straw away from any leaves or stems of your plants and leave about a one to two inch space. You can also make your own straw by planting fast-growing sorghum and just letting it grow and die, then chopping it all down.

Free wood chips You can get them for free from a variety of places, such as: Local tree services, Electric companies, Phone companies, etc.

Christmas tree shredding Christmas season is a great time to pick up a lot of free mulch. Instead of going to individual homeowners, go to the companies that offer free tree shredding and see if they'll give you some of their waste.