

Sheet Mulching



Sheet mulching, also called *composting in place*, is a gardening technique for creating a fertile planting area without tilling the soil. By layering compost materials on the surface, much like a layer cake, you build organic matter and microorganisms into the soil that can then be utilized by plants.

Just as with building a compost pile, you want about 2/3 “browns,” or carbon sources, and 1/3 “greens,” or nitrogen sources. The following are some good materials:

Browns—carbon rich

Cardboard
Newspaper
Straw
Dried leaves
Wood chips or shavings
Bark

Greens—nitrogen rich

Grass clippings
Compost
Manure
Fresh weeds
Produce scraps
Blood meal
Seaweed

You want to alternate the greens and browns and also layer in some compost to introduce micro- and macro-organisms into the pile. You’ll finish your sheet-mulching with wood chips to encourage fungal microorganisms, increasing diversity and resilience. Be sure to water each layer thoroughly.

Many techniques for sheet mulching exist. Here’s our recipe for sheet mulching:

1. Plant your tree in the center of the 8-ft-wide circle. The top of the root ball should be even with the top of the soil.
2. Within 6 inches of the trunk, plant about five daffodils, 3–4 inches deep. (The daffodils deter little critters like moles from chomping off the young tree’s bark.)
3. Use a garden fork to thoroughly aerate the area and make holes throughout the circle.
4. Water the ground thoroughly.
5. Apply a thin layer of compost.
6. Sprinkle bone meal, lime, and wood ash throughout the circle.
7. Cover the area with cardboard, overlapping where pieces of cardboard come together—except in the center where the tree and daffodils are planted; leave that open.

8. Water thoroughly.
9. Distribute seaweed throughout the circle.
10. Spread a 2- to 3-inch layer of leaves or equivalent (BROWN).
11. Water thoroughly.
12. Spread a 2-inch layer of compost or equivalent (GREEN).
13. Spread a layer of straw or salt marsh hay or equivalent (BROWN).
14. Water thoroughly.
15. Spread one bag of coffee or equivalent (GREEN).
16. Spread a 2- to 3-inch layer of leaves.
17. Water thoroughly.
18. Spread a 1-inch layer of glass clippings or equivalent (GREEN).
19. Spread a layer of straw or salt marsh hay.
20. Water thoroughly.
21. Plant the supporting plants.
22. Top with 2 inches of wood chips or bark mulch.