

WHY SHEET MULCHING?

Sheet mulching is an easy method of lawn removal that doesn't involve digging the lawn out or using chemicals.

- Saves time, money, and water.
- Builds healthy living soil.
- Suppresses weed growth.
- Creates attractive drought tolerant gardens.

MAINTENANCE TIPS:

- ✓ **Reapply mulch and add compost.** Keep your soil healthy and plants thriving by adding fresh compost around existing perennials, shrubs, and trees. Replenish mulch with a fresh layer of wood chips to help with weed control and increase water retention. Add cardboard to any weedy patches.

- ✓ **Fill in plants.** Some plants may not have made it through their first year. Add new plants in the empty places. You may be able to divide some of the successful plants or sow wildflower seeds in the winter. Choose plants that are selected for your microclimate and allow space for plants to grow by avoiding overplanting.

- ✓ **Check irrigation.** The first year of watering is important for establishing your new plants. After the first year, slowly cut back on water for the native and drought tolerant plants. Check your irrigation system for leaks, and where necessary adjust emitters based on plant needs.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

FREE cardboard can be found at bike, mattress, and appliance stores, big box stores, solar panel suppliers, and at the landfill. Tree services may deliver arbor mulch free of charge.

Look for the Water Smart Plant Label at local nurseries to find plants adapted to our local climate, using less water once established. For a list of nurseries with Water Smart Plants: SavingWaterPartnership.org/plant-label/



If you have plant questions, contact the UC Master Gardener Help Desk:

phone: (707) 565-2608
email: mgsonoma@ucdavis.edu

For a FREE consultation with UC Master Gardeners of Sonoma County Garden Sense volunteers, call 707-565-3026

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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UC Master Gardener
University of California
Agriculture & Natural Resources



Garden Sense is a cooperative program between the UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County and the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership

Version 7.2

SENSE
Garden
SONOMA COUNTY

Do-It-Yourself Lawn Conversion

UC Master Gardener Program
of Sonoma County



Before



After

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO SHEET MULCHING

1. If offered, apply for a lawn conversion rebate from your local water supplier.
2. Dig out weeds and other unwanted plants. Be careful not to spread weeds that can regrow from root fragments (e.g. Bermuda grass) or bulbs (e.g. oxalis and yellow nutsedge).
3. Cut grass as low as possible and leave clippings in place. Water the area thoroughly.
4. If you have an automated sprinkler system, convert it to drip irrigation.
5. Bevel all edges 12 inches from hardscape to accommodate the addition of 5 inches of compost and mulch.
6. Contour the area to optimize rainwater capture. Turn dug out sod upside down and use to create mounds.
7. Plant any 5 gallon or larger plants in a hole 2-3 times as wide as the plant container. Leave top of rootball 3-4 inches above the existing soil surface to accommodate the addition of compost and mulch.
8. Add a thin layer of compost.
9. Lay cardboard or newspaper over the area. Overlap by at least 6-inches and use sufficient material to block

out light. Use multiple layers if using thin cardboard, or at least 5 sheets of newspaper.

10. Thoroughly wet the cardboard to keep in place and kick start the process of decomposition.
11. Add 2-4 inches of mulch.

IF WAITING TO PLANT

Fall is the best time to plant in Sonoma County because plant performance and planting are optimized after several months of decomposition.

IF PLANTING IMMEDIATELY

1. Install plants from 4-inch and 1-gallon containers then water thoroughly.
2. Install drip irrigation.
3. Finish with 2-4 inches of mulch.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Keep compost and mulch well away from the trunk and crown of plants to prevent crown rot.
2. Monitor new plants for water stress. Even low water use plants require regular irrigation until established.
3. Hand weed the area to allow new plants to become established.

POST SHEET MULCHING CHECKLIST:

- ✓ **Regularly check for water.** If the soil is dry down to the roots, it is time to water. If the soil is still moist, hold off for a few more days and check again.
- ✓ **Keep an eye on your plants.** Check to be sure your plants are staying healthy. A bit of transplant shock is normal in the first couple of weeks. Drooping or yellow leaves may be a sign that something is wrong.
- ✓ **Check your mulch and cardboard.** Some of your mulch may be displaced due to pets or other garden visitors. Be sure to keep the cardboard covered with a layer of mulch.
- ✓ **Weeds?** Pull any you see. If there is a large area of weeds, it could be where cardboard coverage isn't complete or the cardboard ripped.