



Garden Tips & Techniques: Mulching

A layer of mulch provides lots of benefits in the garden. Mulch is especially important in extreme weather conditions, as it helps to regulate temperatures and soil moisture as well as protecting soil from eroding. If you mulch your garden, you'll need to water and weed less often. Mulching can also protect plants from some soil-borne diseases, as it creates a barrier between the soil and plants' lower leaves. And, biodegradable mulch breaks down and adds organic matter to the soil, creating a healthier growing environment well into the future.



Straw mulch around chard at Braddock Farms.

Here are some tips for mulching your garden and reaping all these great benefits!

- Choose biodegradable mulch. Some great options include dead leaves, dry grass clippings, straw, or a thick layer of weed-seed-free compost. To add to the weed suppressing ability of the mulch, place a layer of water-soaked newspaper pages (getting them wet keeps them from blowing away), burlap, or cardboard underneath the mulch.
- Cultivate or weed before placing mulch on the garden. Or, use an extra thick layer of mulch to make sure the weeds won't be able to access sunlight.
- Mulch thickly around each plant, but leave an open ring right around the stem. This deters slugs, which love to live in mulch, from climbing up plant stems.



Straw mulch on beds and bark mulch on walkways at the Frick Kitchen Garden.

- Wood chips work well as a mulch in walkways but are not great in garden beds with most food crops. They acidify the soil and take a very long time to decompose, which can make them hard to deal with in subsequent years. Wood chips work great as a mulch for berry bushes and trees.
- A layer of mulch can protect the soil over the winter, and help cold-hardy crops to overwinter. The overwintered mulch that remains can act as a base layer of mulch for next year's garden, or it can be raked off the garden and composted.



Leaf mulch, applied heavily in the fall, can last through the following season, like in this home garden.