Summit Achieve Community Garden

ORGANIC GARDEN MULCH

REASONS TO MULCH
-- Reduce weed germination and provide barrier to emerging weeds
-- Maintain uniform moisture conditions by reducing evaporation
-- Decrease impact of heavy rainfall, e.g., puddling, splashing of soil onto vegetables; allows slow, steady water filtration
-- Organic mulches protect roots by acting as insulation from extreme heat
-- Organic mulches add nutrients and humus to the soils as they decompose, improving its tilth and moisture-holding capacity

RECOMMENDED ORGANIC MULCHES
1. Leaves (partially decomposed or shredded)
   -- 2” - 3” layer after compaction
   -- Reapply as needed to maintain 2” - 3”
   -- Shred with shredder or lawn mower
   -- Improves soil structure as decomposes
   -- Attractive mulch
   -- Must add nitrogen fertilizer as mulch decomposes; micro-organisms take nitrogen from soil as decomposing leaves

2. Grass clippings
   -- 2” layer
   -- Dry grass completely before applying
   -- Add gradually to reach 2”
   -- Reapply throughout season to maintain 2”
   -- Do not use if lawn has been chemically treated that season
   -- Avoid crab grass and grass full of seed heads
   -- Excellent source of nitrogen as decomposes

3. Hay or Straw
   -- 6” - 8” layer
   -- Decomposes quickly; must be replenished
   -- Avoid hay full of weeds and brambles
   -- Improves soil structure as decomposes
   -- Alfalfa hay, if available, is recommended; high in nitrogen and other nutrients
   -- For all other types of hay and straw, must add nitrogen fertilizer as mulch decomposes; micro-organisms take nitrogen from soil while decomposing hay/straw
4. Newspaper and cardboard
   -- 2 - 4 layers of newspaper provides good mulch when wetted and covered with organic mulch
   -- Reapply throughout the season as paper decomposes
   -- Newspaper with colored ink not allowed in SACG; may contain heavy metals
   -- Cardboard is an excellent mulch; cover 1 layer with organic mulch to prevent blowing away

**NOT RECOMMENDED OR NOT ALLOWED ORGANIC MULCHES**

1. Peat moss -- Not recommended
   -- 2” - 3” layer
   -- Provides only fair weed control
   -- May form surface crust
   -- Difficult to wet; blows away when dry
   -- Not sustainable -- slowly renewable; mining is source of atmospheric carbon

2. Wood chips and pine needles -- **Not allowed in SACG garden plots**
   -- Slow to decay and not recommended for vegetable gardens

3. Sawdust -- Depletes nitrogen from soil

**PLASTIC MULCHES**

-- Clear plastic is ineffective weed control
-- Black plastic provides total weed control
-- Black plastic may cause soil temperature to rise too much in mid-summer, damaging roots, unless covered with a good layer of organic mulch to prevent direct absorption of sunlight
-- Cool weather crops, such as greens and broccoli, don’t grow well in the heat produced by plastic mulch
-- Must constantly monitor adequacy of soil moisture
-- Does not feed or improve soil

**WHEN TO APPLY MULCH**

-- Plants are at least 5” tall

-- Organic mulch
   -- apply when soil temperature reaches a minimum of 73 degrees, but before outdoor temperature reaches high 80s

-- Plastic mulch -- apply in spring or early summer