

## Mulch

### What is MULCH?

Mulch is material used to aid plant health or appearance through **water retention, weed suppression, soil-borne disease control, temperature moderation** and **beautification**. Because of the large variety of mulching material available, consider the following:

- Cost (how costly is it to purchase and/or transport?)
- Application (how easy is it to apply and keep in place?)
- Appearance (do you like the looks of it?)
- How do I apply MULCH around vegetables?

Saturate the soil thoroughly and deeply around each plant (or planting area) before applying mulch (or apply the mulch after a heavy rain.) Apply organic mulch 2-4 inches deep around each plant. Avoid excessive depths of mulch. Ensure organic mulch does not touch the stems of any plants to prevent plant damage. Wet down organic mulch after applying it (to hold it in place and keep it from wicking moisture from the soil.)

### What mulches work well in the vegetable garden?

- **STRAW** (usually rye straw is available in the Boston area): Straw is available by the bale at feed stores or larger plant nurseries. Expect some seeds in the straw; any that germinate are easily pulled with regular garden vigilance.
- **SALT MARSH HAY**: Available by the bale at feed stores or plant nurseries. For gardeners who want to be good land stewards, be sure to purchase salt marsh hay that has been harvested without damaging the environment (the supplier must be able to provide you with documentation.)
- **COCOA HULLS**: If you love the smell of chocolate, this is mulch worth trying. This mulch can change soil pH, but will work fine for slightly more acid-loving plants (strawberries, blueberries, etc.) Enjoy the chocolate aroma while applying; after it becomes wet, it will be moldy on the lower layers.
- **PLASTIC**: Sheet plastics or, often, a woven material. It comes by the roll (in varying widths.) It comes in a variety of colors (each color usually lists what crop it's ideal

for.) Some colors cause a crop's pest to get disoriented and leave. Other colors create proper heat conditions for a crop. It is usually easiest to put this type of mulch in place before planting, then put slits in the mulch to plant the crop. This type of mulch needs to be well anchored. It can be a good investment as it often can be used for several years.

- **NEWSPAPER.** Layers of newspaper can work, but it can be messy when wet and blow away when dry. Shredded newspaper works well.