



## Making Your Own Mulch

Mulch provides a finished look to the home landscape and provides many practical benefits to the soil. It helps to retain moisture, suppress weeds, reduce erosion and protect against temperature extremes. Organic mulch also improves soil structure and fertility. The only disadvantage to mulch can be the cost. However, if you have a few raw materials and a little bit of time, you can eliminate the cost by making your own mulch. It's very easy to do.

## What You'll Need

Mulch ingredients, such as:  
leaves, grass clippings,  
wood chips, etc.  
(See Step 2.)

TROY-BILT® chipper/shredder or  
TROY-BILT chipper/shredder/vac or  
TROY-BILT lawn mower  
Garden fork  
Fencing material, optional  
Black plastic



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STEP 1

### Choose a site for your mulch pile.

A mulch pile is a gathering of materials that you collect, mix together and allow to decompose. So you need to choose a site for the pile that is out of the way but easy to reach when you want to add material or access your finished mulch. Your pile will quickly kill any grass or ground cover growing on the site, so you will probably want to place it behind the garage or in some other out-of-sight location. Choosing a level, well-drained location out of the wind is your best bet.

STEP 2

### Collect your mulch ingredients.

The ideal time to start your mulch project is in the fall when leaves are abundant. But you can start anytime by simply using what is available. Here is a list of mulch ingredients that you can start to collect from your own yard or from your neighbor's.

Leaves	Lumber shavings*
Grass clippings	Pine needles**
Wood chips	Sawdust
Twigs & branches	Farm waste
Tree bark	Chopped hay or straw

\* NOT from chemically treated lumber.

\*\* Pine needles are acidic and should not be used in great quantity except around acid-loving plants and shrubs.

STEP 3

### Prepare the materials.

For the most attractive and beneficial mulch, all of your materials should be chopped or shredded before they are added to the mulch pile. Leaves should be shredded so that they don't mat together. Twigs and branches should be chipped so that they are no more than 1"-2" in size.

A [TROY-BILT® chipper/shredder](#) can really help with this step. Simply run leaves, twigs, branches, bark, etc. through the machine and add the shredded material to the mulch pile. Or use a [TROY-BILT® chipper/shredder/vac](#) to clean up fall leaves and yard waste, then simply empty the collection bag onto your pile. If you don't have a chipper/shredder, you can simply run your [TROY-BILT® lawn mower](#) over your leaves to chop them up. Of course a [TROY-BILT® lawn mower with a grass catcher](#) is the best way to collect your grass clippings, too.



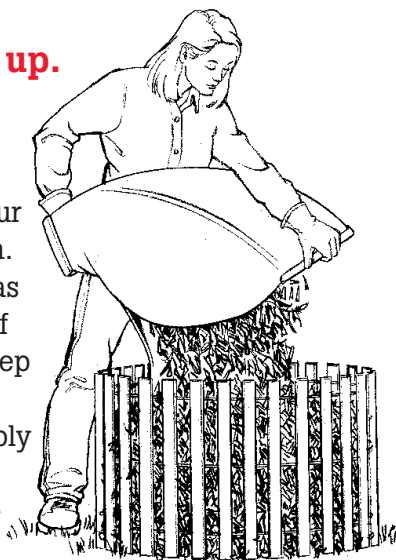
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### STEP 4 Pile it up.

Simply make a pile of your materials in your chosen location. Add materials as you get them. If you want to keep your pile contained, simply create a ring around the pile with fencing material such as chicken wire or wooden or plastic snow fence.



### STEP 5 Stir it up.

Every so often, or every time you add material to the pile, stir or mix the pile with a garden fork. This ensures an even distribution of the various ingredients and helps reduce the matting and clumping of materials such as leaves and grass clippings.

### STEP 6 Cover it up.

Use a large sheet of inexpensive black plastic to cover your mulch pile. This will help retain moisture and heat in the pile, which will



help speed the decomposition of the mulch materials. Secure the plastic with bricks or rocks so that the cover stays in place but is easy to remove when you want to access the pile.

### STEP 7 Spread it around.

After a short time your homemade mulch will begin to settle and decompose, eventually creating dark, crumbly organic material that will look great—and do great things!—in your gardens. (This is in fact the beginning of compost. See our CREATE A COMPOST PILE project for more information.)

Frankly, you can use your mulch at any time. If you have chopped up the materials and mixed them together thoroughly, the mixture will look good immediately and will provide many benefits to your garden. The more it decomposes, either in the mulch pile or after it is applied to the garden, the more benefits it will add in terms of nutrients and soil structure improvement. PLEASE NOTE: If you are using new, un-aged mulch with a high proportion of new wood chips or sawdust, it will tend to leach nitrogen from the soil. To compensate for this, sprinkle some nitrogen-rich fertilizer onto the garden surface.

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### Tips on where, when and how much to mulch.

#### WHERE

You can use mulch all around your landscape. Always keep the mulch a bit away from plant stems and trunks to help prevent pest damage and rot.

- Annual flowerbeds (till into the soil at the end of the growing season)
- Perennial flowerbeds
- Container plantings
- Around trees
- Around shrubs
- Between rows in the vegetable garden (till into the soil at the end of the growing season)

#### WHEN

Summer mulch can be applied at any time after the soil has warmed. Make sure the soil is moist (but not soggy), aerated and weed-free before applying your mulch. Reapply as needed once the mulch starts to decompose into the soil, being sure not to exceed the recommended depth. (See below.)

Winter mulch is used as insulation and should be applied in late fall when the soil is cool but not frozen.

#### HOW DEEP

- Coarse-textured mulch—with a high concentration of wood chips or newly shredded leaves—can be applied fairly thick: 4–6 inches deep.

- Fine-textured mulch—crumbly, well-aged mulch or mulch with a good deal of sawdust, fine straw, etc.—should be no deeper than 2–3 inches deep.
- Winter mulch may need to be applied more thickly in cold regions—up to 8 inches deep.

#### HOW MUCH WILL YOU NEED?

When you buy mulch, it is usually sold by the cubic yard. When you make your own, you can roughly estimate how many cubic yards you have by measuring your mulch pile. How many yards of mulch you will need for your gardens depends on how deeply you plan to apply it.

You can easily determine how much total mulch you need. First figure the square footage of your garden—simply multiply length by width. Then multiply this number by the depth at which you plan to mulch in inches. Divide this number by 324 to get the number of square yards you will need.

Or you can use this table for a rough estimate.

#### AREA COVERED BY ONE CUBIC YARD OF MULCH:

GARDEN AREA IN SQUARE FEET	DEPTH OF MULCH IN INCHES
80	4
100	3
160	2

