

How to Remove a Lawn with Sheet Mulching

Adapted from

Sunset



Sheet mulching in action

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While you might have heard of using plastic sheeting, chemicals, or sod cutters to remove lawns, those methods either kill the soil biology, are toxic, or waste valuable topsoil that goes to waste at the landfill. Instead, keep that valuable topsoil by covering the lawn with layers of cardboard and mulch, which eventually decompose and passively fortify the soil. Here's how to do it:

1. Locate Materials: You can get free, heavy-duty, large pieces of used cardboard at furniture or appliance stores or you can buy 4ft-wide rolled cardboard at Coast Paper in Santa Cruz. Remove large tape or staples from the free cardboard.

Mulch or wood chips can be delivered or picked up at landscape supply outlets or delivered **free or at low cost** from tree companies (you'll be put on a list when they have jobs in your area). These tree company chips will generally be coarser, last longer and have a more rustic look than finished or dyed chips that you buy- if you want a more refined look, you can top dress the chips with store-bought mulch.

2. Prep: Cut the grass on your mower's lowest setting and dig 6" deep furrow (about the width of a square shovel) wherever grass meets hardscape (e.g. driveways, sidewalks, borders), so the chips don't spill onto your hardscape. Cap off any sprinkler heads (with PVC caps and glue) that will no longer be needed, and flag the head(s) you may be converting to drip irrigation.

3. Install: Do the installation on a calm day. Use one layer of salvaged cardboard (free) or two layers of rolled cardboard (purchased). If you use the salvaged cardboard, spray down both sides before placing. Lay the cardboard, overlapping any margins or flaps by a good 6 inches, blocking out all light to the grass. As you lay the cardboard down, place the woods chips or mulch on top to keep it in place.

Plant right away or wait if you like. To plant, cut holes in the cardboard, flag the spot, and then run drip irrigation lines to plants from your retrofitted sprinkler head(s). Amend the planting area with compost, plant, then fill the area in with wood chips/mulch. Never fold chips into soil, and keep chips/mulch away from plant trunk or foliage.

Enjoy this inexpensive easy, and environmentally sound method of replacing your lawn!