



# Lose your lawn – the Bay-Friendly way

Sheet mulching is an easy way to replace your lawn

[www.LoseYourLawn.org](http://www.LoseYourLawn.org)

Now is a great time to transform your conventional lawn into a Bay-Friendly garden. Sheet mulching is a technique of laying cardboard or newspaper over an existing lawn and then topping it off with layers of compost and wood mulch. The layers suppress weed growth and break down naturally – creating a vibrant ecosystem that gives you healthier soil and plants.

Sheet mulching can be done all at once or a little bit at a time. It doesn't require the use of heavy equipment or pesticides. Sheet mulching can be completed in one day, depending on the size of the area you are covering. The best time to sheet mulch is in the fall to take advantage of the rains, but it can be done any time of year. There are many different ways to sheet mulch. The following is a simple method recommended by the Bay-Friendly program:

## 1 PREPARE THE SITE

- **Mow or knock down tall weeds** so they lie flat.
- **Remove woody, bulky and invasive plants** such as blackberries, oxalis, horsetail, kikuyu and Bermuda grass.
- **Flag your sprinkler heads** if you plan to retrofit your sprinkler heads for drip irrigation.



Knock down weeds.

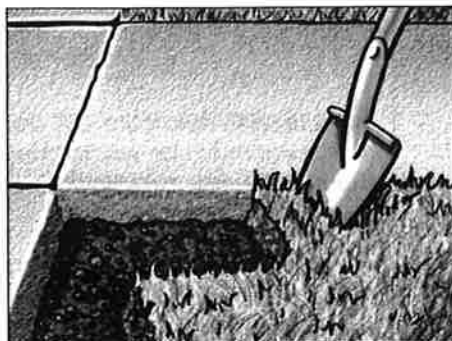


Soak the area.

**Soak the area** with water to start the natural process of decomposition

## 2 EDGING & MOUNDING FOR EROSION CONTROL

- **Edge the lawn** to avoid run-off and keep mulch from spilling onto paving. Use a flat-edged shovel to cut the lawn 8-12 inches away from the edge of the concrete. The soil should be at least 3 inches below the top of the concrete.



- **Create mounds** using the leftover soil and sod from edging, or simply sheet mulch in place. Just flip the edges over so the roots and soil face up. Don't worry if you encounter the plastic netting that came with your sod, just throw away the pieces that you see. Mounds can create visual interest in the garden by adding height and depth. Many native plants like well drained soil and thrive on mounds.



## 3 PLANT LARGE PLANTS

- **Install 5-gallon or larger plants** once the area has been prepared.



## 4 ADD A WEED BARRIER

- **Add a weed barrier** that is permeable to water and air, such as cardboard, newspaper or burlap. Recycled cardboard boxes can be found at appliance stores or bike shops.  
Do not use plastic or types of weed cloth which will not degrade.



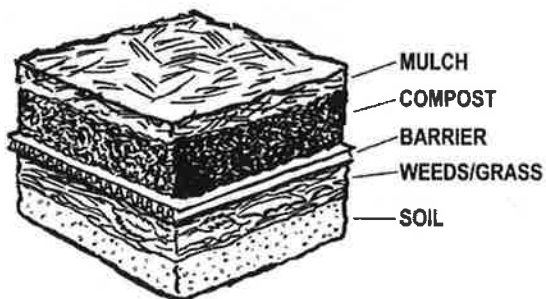
CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE...

- **Overlap the pieces by 6-8 inches** so the sun won't get through. Any lawn showing at the end of the project will come right back.
- **Wet down the cardboard as you go** to keep it in place and to shape it around obstacles.
- **Work around existing plants** by ripping and folding the cardboard. It's easier to rip once wet.
- **Completely cover the ground** with the cardboard except where there are plants that you plan to keep.



## 5 LAYER WITH COMPOST AND MULCH

- **Add compost and mulch on top of the cardboard.** Spread compost directly over the cardboard and then cover it with bulky materials like wood chips to optimize water conservation and weed control. Adding 1-2 inches of compost will help build soil and provide a planting medium for 4-inch or smaller plants. However, if your main goal is weed suppression just add the mulch.



- **The compost/mulch layer should be a total of 3 to 5 inches deep.** The top layer of mulch mimics the newly fallen organic matter of a forest. Good materials for the top layer include chipped plant debris, tree prunings, leaves or even straw. You will need a lot of mulch. To determine the amount of mulch and/or compost needed, please see the calculators on [LoseYourLawn.org](http://LoseYourLawn.org).



## 6 PLANT

- **Punch or cut holes in the cardboard** and place your larger plants in the soil under the mulch. In cooler climates, smaller plants (4-inch pots) can be planted right into the mulch/compost layer on top of the cardboard. Add compost around the root ball if compost was not included in the previous layer.



## 7 PROBLEM PREVENTION

- **Your new plants will require water** and attention when they are young, even if they are drought-tolerant.
- **Do not pile materials** up against tree trunks or stems of plants.
- **Small seedlings may need protection** from snails and slugs that like to hide under the mulch, especially in the dry season.
- **Protect young trees from rodents** with physical guards like metal bands that wrap around the base.



For a detailed description and case study of lawn removal with sheet mulch, be sure to check out the *Bay-Friendly Gardening Guide*, download or order online at [BayFriendly.org](http://BayFriendly.org).

For information on lawn conversion rebates, where to find local materials, instructional videos and other resources, visit [LoseYourLawn.org](http://LoseYourLawn.org).