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Sheet Mulching: Easy Composting

1. Sheet composting is simply combining the strategies of sheet mulching with composting. Using a 10-12 inch thick mulch on any soil saves time, labor, and water. Weeds do not have a chance to grow, earth worms move up to feed and aerate the soil, and the method can be used near buildings and plants.
2. Don't level the soil. Don't dig. Don't weed the area. Bend to the ground any weeds or other plant material. If the soil is compacted, add a handful of sulphur for each 2 square feet. Spread 1/2 cup of bone-meal or blood meal (or both) over the area. Cover with 1" of chicken, goat, rabbit, or other manure. Water thoroughly.
3. Add 3" of weeds, hay, straw, grass clippings, or anything that may have seeds. Finely chopped kitchen food scraps will feed the worms. Water thoroughly. Overlap completely with cardboard, or four sheets of newspaper (NO GLOSSY PRINT). If there are existing plants you want to keep in place, overlap the paper or cardboard up to the plant stem(s). Then fold newspapers at right angles to the ground to the plant stem(s). Water thoroughly.
4. Apply 4" of any mixture of seed-free materials: horse stable straw, seaweed, dried leaves, rotted alfalfa hay, and in alkaline soils, pine needles.
5. The last 4" layer of dry materials, free of weed seeds, must be left on the surface until broken down. Use dry leaves, straw, pine needles, old sawdust, but NO redwood bark.

Soak with water and it is ready to plant immediately.

To plant large seeds, tubers, small plants, and seedling: with a knife or machete, cut a hole through the cardboard. Put a handful of GOOD soil into the hole. Plant. Put in another handful of GOOD soil. Gently pull the mulch to the base of the plant. Water.

To plant small seeds: make a long slit in the cardboard. Fill the slit with GOOD soil. Plant. Water. Cover lightly with mulch. Add more mulch as the seedlings grow. Root crops: the first year, set up a temporary bed for root crops. Because the soil is compacted, and too much manure is underneath, the roots will fork out.

Maintaining the sheet mulch: Thoroughly chop the kitchen food wastes and tuck under the cardboard layer. Or chop food wastes in a blender or food processor with water to make "soup" and pour under the cardboard. Any unwanted plants, including bermuda grass, can be smothered with wet newspaper and tucked under the cardboard. Occasionally scatter a handful of bonemeal and blood meal, or kelp, on top. Add top mulch to keep the pile at 12". The mulch should be loose, so don't walk on it, and don't let it mat.

Repeat plantings: Plant year round, no need to rotate or rest the soil, which will become dark and rich in time.

– L. LOCKHART 2-93