



Mulching is one of the most rewarding jobs in the vegetable garden! It not only helps your garden look neat and tidy, but prevents the soil from losing moisture, keeps weeds down and helps keep the soil cool. Mulch also helps prevent rotting, which can happen when vegetables touch the ground.

The best mulch for your garden is one that's easy to find, inexpensive (or free!) and simple to lay out. How much you use depends on the mulch type; you'll want to use enough to prevent weeds from popping through, but not so much that air and water can't reach the plants' roots. Consider these:

Compost: An especially good mulch, compost has fertilizer value and looks like soil. Finished compost is also a good organic amendment for tilling into the soil after the growing season ends. Unfinished compost works best as a top mulch around plants.

Leaves: Leaves are an easy material to find in New England in the fall. They release some nutrients as they break down and spread easily. To prevent them from forming a mat when they get wet, shred them first with a lawn mower or leaf shredder. They can be applied immediately or turned into the compost pile in fall and used during the growing season.

Grass clippings: As you mow in spring and summer, you can bag the clippings from your chemical-free lawn and have a convenient, free mulch. Spread them in the garden in thin layers, letting each layer dry, and slowly build up to an inch thick. Too much at once and the grass will mat, blocking out water, over-heating the soil below and developing a foul smell.

Straw/hay: Straw and hay are both lightweight and easy to apply. You can usually find hay bales from local farms or bagged, shredded straw from local garden centers. Watch out though— most hay also has some weed seeds.

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