



MULCH LAYER

Simple field equipment for homesteads or hobby farms

1023



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- Mulch Layer, Sub-Compact
- Adjustable 36-42" mulch width
- Use on flat beds or raised beds

Equip to apply drip tape or mark plant locations in the same field pass



K1212 mulch layer attachment for bed shaper



Drip Tape Applicator - page G-7
Dry Wheel Puncher - page G-9

GARDEN EQUIPMENT PRIMER

MULCH LAYERS

Plastic mulch provides a greenhouse effect to warm the soil and tends to balance moisture between rains but the primary benefit is weed control. The steps to apply and remove plastic mulch require a fraction of the time and energy otherwise spent for mechanical cultivation or hand-pulling weeds to merely attempt to achieve the same results. Another benefit is protection of fruit that sits on the ground like cucumbers, melons, pumpkins and tomatoes. Possible benefits from colored mulch is solar reflection and pest control.

Plastic mulch leads to drip irrigation since it tends to act as a barrier to rain. However, enough rain can still moisten the bed through the furrows and plant holes. Matting or woven materials are designed to let water penetrate, which works as long as pointed weeds do not also penetrate the other way. The cost of these materials may limit the scale of use.

When applying mulch over raised beds, adjust bed shaper to work with mulch layer. With 36" plastic a 24" bed top is recommended. With 42" plastic, a 30" bed top. Mulch layers can be used on well-drained



flat beds or raised beds and feature opening disks to form trenches, tuck wheels to hold down mulch edges and covering boards to cover mulch edges. Minimum mulch or bed row spacing (center-to-center) is 42" for 36" mulch or 48" for 42" mulch.

Forming beds and applying mulch in one pass with a combined machine is possible. Apply 36" plastic on a 20" bed top or 42" plastic on a 26" bed top. Be sure a sub-compact tractor will lift a longer and heavier machine. Added front tractor weight may be needed.

PLASTICULTURE

Growers more interested in sustainable agriculture may frown on having to remove and dispose of plastic, but the substantial improvement over weed control with plastic mulch is not easy to dismiss. Man may be plagued with bulging landfills but before that man was - and continues to be - plagued with weeds and pests.

Natural mulches include straw and cover crops, which tend to be practical to apply on a small scale.



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