



Mulch stops weeds and holds water in the soil. You'll get better plant growth and spend less time weeding. Below are some different types of mulches.

Chipped woody vegetation

Branches and trees that have been cut down and chipped make fantastic and inexpensive mulch. It can be purchased from tree loppers but make sure to ask for mulch free of weedy seeds. This type of mulch contains leaves and wood chips so breaks down gradually. This more closely mimics the natural leaf litter cycle and so is healthier for soil dwelling organisms.

Spread this mulch to a thickness of 5 cm or deeper if you are not planning to plant straight away. Wood chips with no leafy material can be purchased from many nurseries. This type of mulch will last well and look more formal but is often more expensive.

Stones and pebbles

These may be useful in suppressing weeds in areas where people walk across the garden. They allow water to pass through to the soil and so create less run off than solid paving. Small stones and pebbles will not breakdown but fallen leaves may build up on top of them limiting their ability to suppress weeds. It is important to check with the supplier that stones and pebbles are sourced from a sustainable location and not a river bed.

Lucerne/ pea straw

Organic mulches with no woody component are useful for vegetable gardens but break down too quickly for most other applications. They are easy to find at most nurseries.

Recycled or reused materials

Recycled glass and rubber tyre mulches are available in a variety of colours. These mulches will not breakdown or alter the soil below. They may be useful for no dig ornamental gardens and children's play areas but may be difficult to maintain in a garden bed where digging and replanting occurs.

Old woollen carpet, newspapers and cardboard are often used to suppress the growth of difficult to control weeds. Woollen carpet (or similar commercially available jute mat) can also be used to hold loose soil on a steep slope. They can create a barrier to air and water flow into the soil below, so only use them when chipped mulch is not an option.

Before spreading the mulch you should remove unwanted vegetation. This can be done a number of ways:

- Hand pull – ineffective for plants with runners or bulbs
- Scalping – removal of the top layer of soil using a spade or machinery
- Herbicide – Commercially available herbicides are effective at killing most plants. If the plant is dormant (i.e. couch grass in winter) the herbicide will be less effective. Always follow the directions of the label or hire a licensed contractor.

More information on weed control can be found in the booklet *Sustainable Living in Banyule: a guide for your garden*, or by searching Banyule's web site.