

Plastic Mulch Helps To Cut Garden Work

Home vegetable and flower gardeners whose enthusiasm and energy tend to wane when hot weather and weeds threaten to take over might want to try mulching transplanted crops with a black polyethylene film this year.


The film not only stops weed growth, but it helps hold valuable moisture in the soil and the black surface helps warm the soil, declares Robert Carolus, horticulturist at Michigan State University.

What's more, studies at Michigan State show that the film helps boost the number and size of fruits. In one test, the yield of early tomatoes was more than doubled.

An additional advantage comes from the fact that plant roots close to the surface of the soil are not cut by cultivation. They can make good use of the nutrients in the only fertile top soil, Carolus believes.

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can profit from the idea, too. Grasses that follow improved production practices to get top yields and who have developed premium markets for their produce will get the most benefit from the mulch, the horticulturist says.

Black plastic mulches will work nicely on eggplant, cucumbers, peppers, melons and tomatoes.

For the commercial gardener, enough polyethylene film to cover two-thirds of an acre will cost between \$150 to \$160. If large areas are to be covered, Carolus suggests growers devise an attachment, so the material can be unrolled into the soil surface from a tractor.

THE PLASTIC mulching idea should find considerable use in northern Michigan, where summer temperatures are cool, Carolus thinks. He warns, however, that mulch-covered areas are more subject to frost injury than bare soils because the plastic holds the heat in the soil.

Landscaping Tips Listed By U-M Prof.

In designing the open areas of the grounds surrounding your home, think about the way you're going to use them for every day living, playing and working out of doors, says Harlow O. Whitcomb, professor of landscape architecture at The University of Michigan.

Want a playground for the small child? "It should be broad and as long to permit them to run off in all directions. If the space is primarily for strolling or strolling, a narrow glade of grass will do. This would be especially attractive if the walk is cut deep into a young woods.

Or a playground for old and young for lawn tennis or croquet? "The dimensions should be such as to permit the layout of these areas. Bowling should have a grassy space about 120 feet long by 20 feet wide—or better still, 40 feet wide to permit changing courts.

"LAWN TENNIS permits the lawn to be used as part of the view by removing the net. If the open space is a panel which is to be bordered with perennials and other flowers or flowering shrubs hanked against taller hedges or other walls, the hills being spaced about a foot apart as shown in the diagram.

Before sowing any seed outdoors, the soil should be turned over, fertilized and raked smooth. As a rule, the smaller the seeds, the shallower it is planted.

Tiny petunias and snapdragons seeds can be pressed gently into the soil after the seed is broadcast from the packet. Nasturtiums, sunflowers, beans and corn can either be pressed into the soil about a half-inch or if they are sown in drills, the furrowed soil should be pushed back over them to about that depth.

BUT TO REMOVE any doubt from your mind as to the depth of planting seeds, instructions are always given on the back of each seed packet.

In the vegetable garden, a narrow drill for carrots and beets can be made in the soil with a pointed stick. Medium sized drills for radishes and onions can be made by drawing the hoe on edge along a taut cord between stakes that mark the row. Wide drills for peas and beans are made by using the full width of the hoe.

The distance between rows varies with the crop to be planted. Carrots, beets, beans and lettuce are spaced from 18 to 24 inches apart. Corn and tomato rows go 36 inches apart.

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Seed Sowing Has Its Own Lingo

Gardening has a language all its own. You don't need to join the army to "drill." It simply means that seed is sown in a furrow cut in the soil with a hoe or stick.

"Broadcast" has nothing to do with radio or television. It means to scatter seed over a wide area of ground.

A "hill" is not a hill at all. To gardeners, it means that a few seeds are planted in a little circle.

Most vegetables are seeded in drills or furrows. If you prefer, although a few, such as leaf lettuce (see diagram) are broadcast and some, such as cucumbers and squash, are planted in hills.

ANNUAL FLOWERS for the most part are seeded outdoors by the broadcast method. Seeds large enough to pick up in the fingers, such as marigolds and zinnias, may be placed three to a foot apart as shown in the diagram.

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To conserve space, or to make the most of it, radish and lettuce that go into the ground a month or more before corn and tomatoes, are planted between the proposed corn and tomato rows. This is one form of succession planting.

AFTER THE SEED is sown and covered with soil, it should be watered with a fine sprinkler. Keep the ground moist at all times until germination. It's not necessary to sprinkle the entire garden just the seeded drills or patches. Why encourage weed seeds to germinate between the rows?

So, in the garden vermicular, let's all get in and drill and broadcast and plant in hills.

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