

SHEET MULCH PARTY TOOLKIT



Everything you need to go from lawn to garden.

SHEET MULCH PARTY TOOLKIT

Sheet mulching is a simple technique used to remove a lawn without using grass-killing chemicals. Hosting a neighborhood sheet mulch party to remove your lawn makes it even easier. This toolkit will help guide you through the necessary steps for hosting a successful sheet mulch party.

— PLANNING —

Many an eager gardener can tell a tale of planting first and then considering the consequences. Whether you are planning to remove your entire lawn or a portion of your yard, the following checklist will help get you started planning your lawn conversion and sheet mulch party.

- Take a *before* picture of your yard. (Make note of where you're standing for a great before/after comparison.)
- Complete the design survey and measure your yard (a survey and graph paper for your measurements can be found on pages 3-7).



- Check if you qualify for a water rebate. Visit www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch for a current list of available rebates in Alameda County.
- Pick a date for your party.
- Invite your friends. Note: if you need more help, join our Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/FromLawntoGarden/.
- Use the sheet mulch calculator to determine the amount of mulch, cardboard and compost you'll need. Visit www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch for the calculator.
- Source your material. A list of local vendors providing cardboard, compost and mulch can be found at www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch.
- Find a spot to store your materials (driveways are great).
- Order materials to be delivered the day before your party (plan to be home when your materials are delivered).

Note: allow at least 4 weeks for planning your event.



Garden Design Survey

Survey Your Site

It helps to start by identifying what you have, and then building a design around that. Take a few minutes to think about the possibilities and limitations of your site.

1. What is your general exposure?

- Full sun Partial shade Full shade

2. What type of soil do you have?

- Clay Sand Loam

3. Is there a slope?

- Gentle Steep Flat

4. How does water flow? (For example, are there seasonal wet spots or surface water.)

5. How does the soil drain? Will the existing soil need to be amended with compost to improve drainage?

6. Are there areas to avoid? (For example, underground cables, water and sewer pipes, or contaminated soil.)

7. Are wind breaks needed?

8. Is there existing landscaping?

9. Are there plants and other features that you would like to retain from the existing landscape?

10. Where are water spigots? Is there an existing irrigation system?

11. What kind of garden do you have? (Check all that apply.)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flower | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable | <input type="checkbox"/> Edible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herb | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit | <input type="checkbox"/> Rock |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Large tree | <input type="checkbox"/> Collector's plant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife | <input type="checkbox"/> Butterfly | <input type="checkbox"/> Hummingbird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insect-attracting | <input type="checkbox"/> Drought-tolerant | <input type="checkbox"/> Low-maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native plant | <input type="checkbox"/> Permaculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Lawn |

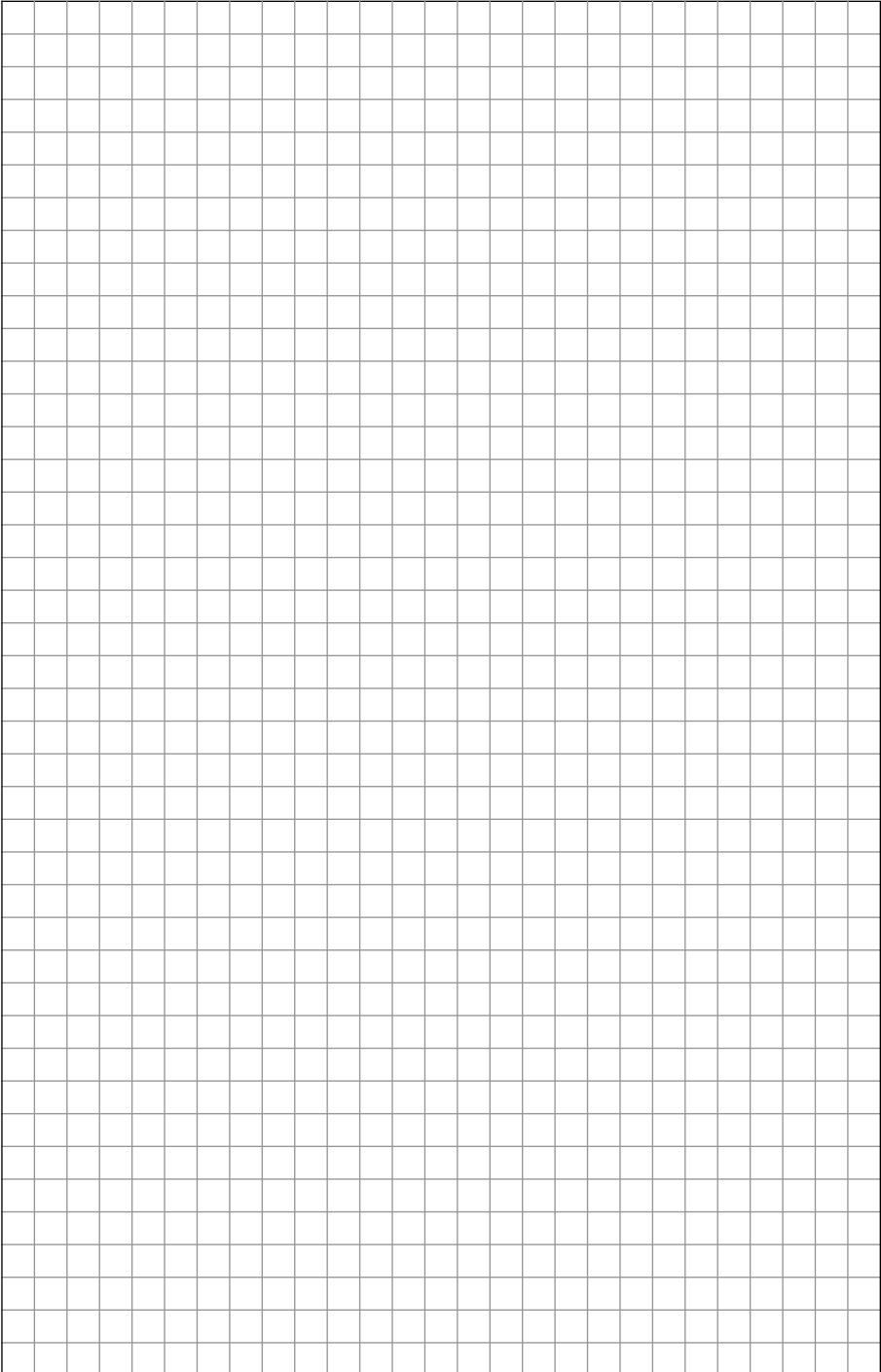
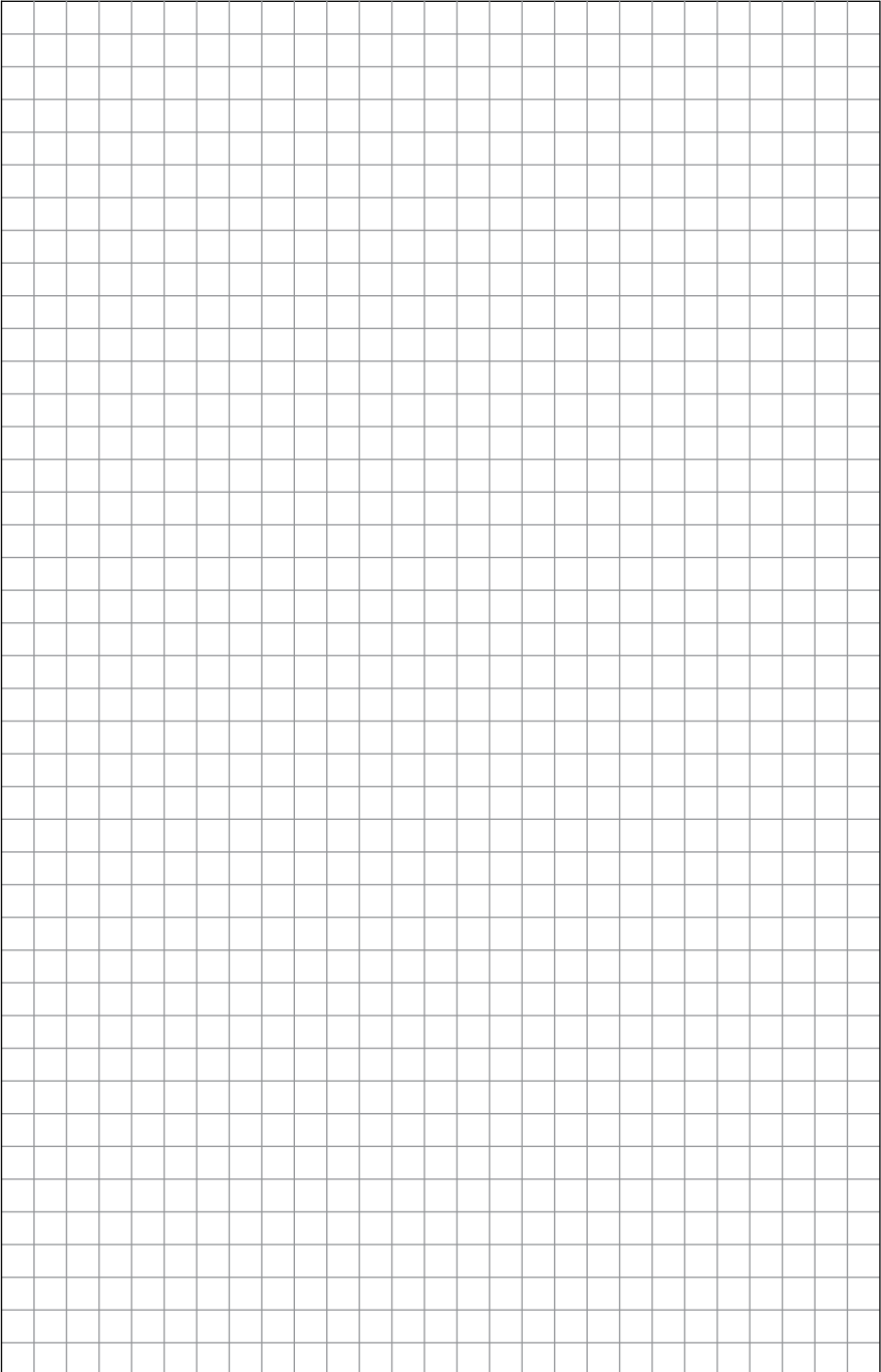
A Garden for Your Lifestyle

Function is an important design element that precedes and determines plant selection. So before heading out to the nursery, consider the many functions of your garden.

1. What do you want to do in your garden?

- Create a children's play area
- Entertain and enjoy meals
- Grow food
- Attract wildlife
- Construct a privacy screen
- Create a welcoming entrance
- Add color
- Add interest to front of house
- Make a utility area
- Feature garden art
- Create a quiet sitting area
- Include room for pets
- Other





— GETTING STARTED —

2. What kind of outdoor structures and features do you want to include?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benches | <input type="checkbox"/> Barbeque | <input type="checkbox"/> Children's play structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birdbath | <input type="checkbox"/> Fountain | <input type="checkbox"/> Pond |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor furniture | <input type="checkbox"/> Greenhouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Potting bench |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deck | <input type="checkbox"/> Patio | <input type="checkbox"/> Storage shed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fence | <input type="checkbox"/> Trellis | <input type="checkbox"/> Gazebo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Garden art | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor lighting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | |

3. What kind of garden do you want?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flower | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable | <input type="checkbox"/> Edible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herb | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit | <input type="checkbox"/> Rock |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland | <input type="checkbox"/> Large tree | <input type="checkbox"/> Collector's plant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife | <input type="checkbox"/> Butterfly | <input type="checkbox"/> Hummingbird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insect-attracting | <input type="checkbox"/> Drought-tolerant | <input type="checkbox"/> Native plant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Permaculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Low-maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

4. How much time do you currently spend gardening (per month)?

5. How much time do you want to spend gardening?

After deciding on your design and inviting neighbors and friends to lend a hand, it is time to prep your site. The following steps will help get your yard ready for sheet mulching.

1. If it has been dry for a while, water anywhere you are going to dig a few days before to make grading easier. If soil is really compacted, start a week prior.
2. Grade at paving, utility boxes and footings (4-6 inches down, 12-18 inches out). See stopwaste.org/sheetmulch for how-to information and videos.
3. Take a picture once the site is prepped.
4. Cut and cap sprinklers, if necessary.
5. If you are incorporating a path or other hardscape into your sheet-mulched area, install it first.



Installing hardscaping prior to sheet mulching

6. Plant bigger (3 gallon or larger) plants before laying down cardboard.
7. Take another picture (document your progress!).
8. Make sure there's a hose with a spray nozzle to get water to the area.
9. Cut down your lawn or mash it down. Visit www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch for tips on handling really tough weeds.
10. Gather up the necessary tools prior to your party to ensure you have all that you need:
 - 5 gallon buckets or a wheelbarrow for moving material (estimate one bucket per helper, 3 gallon or larger plant pots can work, too)
 - Shovels (spade type) for loading wheelbarrows
 - Rakes for smoothing, if desired (hands and feet work just as well and are far less likely to tear wet cardboard)
 - Hand trowels – for planting
 - Brooms (push broom is easiest)
 - Box cutters – to cut cardboard
 - Tarps – for laying down under compost and mulch when delivered. Makes clean up a lot easier.
 - Kraft paper and painters' tape to protect path to bathroom
 - Snacks



— EVENT LOGISTICS —

Day of Event

What to expect?

Depending on how much grading needs to be done, how big your lawn is, and how many helpers you have, the sheet mulching and planting can take a couple hours or a weekend.

If you have a big area or a lot of helpers, it is a good idea to divide your group into teams to tackle different areas of the lawn. Below is a suggested division of labor and suggested number of people per task. If you have fewer helpers, it will take longer, but the tasks are the same. Specific how-to information can be found in the resources.



1. Assign tasks.
2. Remind your crew to empty pockets of keys and phones so they're not lost during sheet mulching.
3. Lay out and cut cardboard (1-2 people).
4. Hose down immediately (1 person).
5. Start applying compost once some cardboard is down (1-3 people to load buckets, 1-2 people to shuttle and dump, 1-2 people to spread).
6. Once compost is down, start applying mulch (1-3 people to load buckets, 1-2 people to shuttle and dump, 1-2 people to spread).
7. Enjoy a well-deserved snack!
8. Install your sheet mulch sign.
9. Clean up.

— RESOURCES —

The following resources are available here to support your lawn conversion:

- Sheet mulch step-by-step
- Guidelines for planting in a dry year
- Plant list
- Online resources

Sheet Mulching Step-By-Step

1. PREPARE THE SITE

- **Mow or knock down tall weeds** so they lie flat.
- **Remove woody, bulky and invasive plants** such as blackberries, oxalis, horsetail, kikuyu and Bermuda grass.
- **Flag your sprinkler heads** if you plan to retrofit your sprinkler heads for drip irrigation.



Knock down weeds

Soak the area



Visit www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch for how-to videos



demonstrating the basics of sheet mulching. Share this link with friends and neighbors prior to your party to give them an introduction to sheet mulching.

What about planting?

We recommend waiting to plant 1 gallon and 4 inch plants in the fall for the following reasons:

- Fall's the best time to plant, especially natives, after the first rains.
- Smaller plants cost less, are healthier and are more likely to thrive
- With the drought, it's better to wait and conserve water you'd use for plants now
- With the sheet mulch feeding the soil for a few months, you'll have rich healthy soil for planting in the fall.

If you need to plant a few 5 gallon plants or trees, make sure you plant before sheet mulching.

What your sheet mulch team needs to bring:

- Sturdy shoes
- Gloves
- Hat
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen

2. EDGING & MOUNDING FOR EROSION CONTROL

- **Edge the lawn** to avoid run-off and keep mulch from spilling onto paving. Use a flat-edged shovel to cut the lawn 8-12 inches away from the edge of the concrete. The soil should be at least 3 inches below the top of the concrete or the height of the mulch layer.
- **Create mounds** using the leftover soil and sod from edging, or simply sheet mulch in place. Just flip the edges over so the roots and soil face up. Don't worry if you encounter the plastic netting that came with your sod, just throw away the pieces that you see. Mounds can create visual interest in the garden by adding height and depth. Many native plants like well-drained soil and thrive on mounds.



Edging



Mounding

3. PLANT LARGE PLANTS

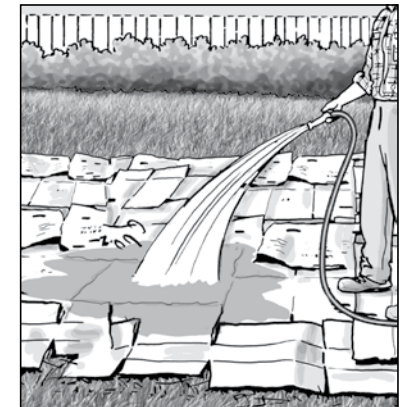
- **Install 5 gallon or larger plants** once the area has been prepared.



Planting

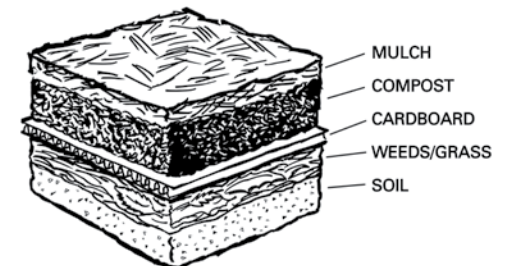
4. ADD A WEED BARRIER

- **Add a weed barrier** that is permeable to water and air, such as cardboard. Recycled cardboard boxes can be found at appliance stores or bike shops. You can also buy recycled cardboard rolls. Do not use plastic or types of weed cloth which will not degrade.
- **Overlap the pieces by 6-8 inches** so the sun won't get through. Any lawn showing at the end of the project will come right back.
- **Wet down the cardboard as you go** to keep it in place and to shape it around obstacles.
- **Work around existing plants** by ripping and folding the cardboard. It's easier to rip once wet.
- **Completely cover the ground** with the cardboard except where there are plants that you plan to keep.



5. LAYER WITH COMPOST AND MULCH

- **Add compost and mulch on top of the cardboard.** Spread compost directly over the cardboard and



then cover it with mulch to optimize water conservation and weed control. Adding 1-2 inches of compost will help build soil and provide a planting medium for 4-inch or smaller plants. However, if your main goal is weed suppression just add the mulch.

- **The compost/mulch layer should be a total of 3 to 5 inches deep.** The top layer of mulch mimics the newly fallen organic matter of a forest. Good materials for the top layer include chipped plant debris, tree prunings, mulch from recycled wood pallets, leaves, or even straw. You will need a lot of mulch. To determine the amount of mulch and/or compost needed, please see the calculator at www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch.



6. PLANT

- **Cut an 'X', pull back flaps and replace after planting.**

Place your larger plants in the soil under the mulch. In cooler climates, smaller plants (4-inch pots) can be planted right into the mulch/compost layer on top of the cardboard. Add compost around the root ball if compost was not included in the previous layer.



PROBLEM PREVENTION

- **Your new plants will require water** and attention when they are young, even if they are drought-tolerant.
- **Do not pile mulch and compost** up against tree trunks or stems of plants.
- **Small seedlings may need protection** from snails and slugs that like to hide under the mulch, especially in the dry season.
- **Protect young trees from rodents** with physical guards like metal bands that wrap around the base.



Guidelines for Planting in a Dry Year

California's mild temperatures and persistent sunshine are famous for a reason: they're uncommon. Few places in the world share with California its wet winters and sunny, dry summers. These are the characteristics of a Mediterranean climate, and they bring with them special growing conditions — most notably the need to choose plants that are well adapted to an annual six-month drought, or in the case of recent years extended periods of drought conditions. Selecting mostly California native and Mediterranean climate plants is one of the most important steps in growing plants appropriate for our climate.



The following guidelines are adapted from Katherine Greenberg's *Native Plants for Seasonal Interest* class and offer helpful tips for planting during a dry year.

1. Plant in late fall and early spring to take advantage of seasonal rainfall and cooler weather. Plan for succession of plantings when water supplies are limited, rather than doing a large-scale planting, or plant sections of a garden.
2. Determine how much planting you can manage with limited water supplies, and use efficient irrigation (drip, spray, hand-watering). Water deeply when planting.
3. Mulch after planting to conserve moisture, shade and cool the soil, and discourage weeds. Organic mulch (tree chippings) can be used with most native plants, keeping it away from the root crown, and inorganic mulch (gravel) is best for succulents.
4. Provide supplemental water manually, as needed, by using an irrigation controller, a hose with an adjustable nozzle, or watering can. Water deeply and infrequently on cool or overcast days with no wind, after checking soil for moisture at the root level.
5. Boulders can be used as edges for plants and paths, and they also conserve moisture around their base for roots to tap into.
6. Use permeable paving materials (gravel, tree chippings) to conserve water on site.
7. Container plants are great for seasonal color, and they can be planted with annuals, perennials, bulbs, succulents, or a mix of plants. Try adding small rocks to a container or use a decorative container in the garden as an accent or focal point, and leave it unplanted.

Plant List

This list is a sampling of plants suited to our Mediterranean climate. For more information about these and other climate-appropriate plants, check the award-winning book from the East Bay Municipal Utility District, *Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Region* (available at local nurseries, online and from EBMUD www.ebmud.com/customers/district-store).



Full Sun, Good Drainage

Trees		CA Native
<i>Feijoa sellowiana</i>	Pineapple guava	
<i>Geijera parviflora</i>	Australian willow	
<i>Leptospermum laevigatum</i> , <i>L. scoparium</i>	Australian tea tree, New Zealand tea tree	
Shrubs		
<i>Artemisia californica</i>	California sagebrush	●
<i>Cistus</i> species and cultivars	Rockrose	
<i>Fremontodendron</i> spp.	Flannel bush	●
<i>Lavatera</i> species and cultivars	Tree mallow	
<i>Lupinus</i> spp.*	Lupine	●
<i>Phlomis fruticosa</i>	Jerusalem sage	
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Rosemary	
<i>Salvia</i> species and cultivars	Sage	
<i>Teucrium fruticans</i>	Germander	
<i>Westringia fruticosa</i>	Coast rosemary	
Perennials		
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Sea thrift	●
<i>Artemisia</i> species and cultivars	Wormwood	
<i>Asclepias speciosa</i>	Showy milkweed	●
<i>Eriogonum</i> species and cultivars	Wild buckwheat	● (certain species)
<i>Lavandula</i> species and cultivars	Lavender	
<i>Nepeta</i> spp.	Catmint	
<i>Penstemon</i> species and cultivars	Penstemon	
<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>	Russian sage	
<i>Salvia</i> spp.	Sage	
<i>Sphaeralcea</i> spp.	Globe mallow	● (certain species)
Groundcovers		
<i>Myoporum parvifolium</i>	Myoporum	
<i>Thymus</i> spp.	Thyme	
Vines		
<i>Bougainvillea</i> cultivars	Bougainvillea	

Full Sun to Part Shade, Good Drainage

Trees		
<i>Arbutus unedo</i> , <i>Arbutus</i> 'Marina'	Strawberry tree	
Shrubs		
<i>Arctostaphylos</i> species and cultivars	Manzanita	●
<i>Ceanothus</i> species and cultivars	California lilac	●
<i>Correa</i> species and cultivars	Australian fuchsia (some sp. prefer full shade)	
<i>Cotinus coggygria</i> and cultivars	Smoke tree	
<i>Garrya elliptica</i>	Silktassel	●
<i>Grevillea</i> species and cultivars	Grevillea	
<i>Heteromeles arbutifolia</i> *	Toyon	●
Perennials		
<i>Alstroemeria</i> hybrids	Peruvian lily	
<i>Coreopsis</i> spp.	Coreopsis	
<i>Epilobium canum</i>	California fuchsia	●
<i>Gaura lindheimeri</i>	Gaura	
<i>Heuchera micrantha</i>	Coral bells (prefers part shade)	●
<i>Phacelia</i> spp.	Phacelia	●
<i>Thymus</i> spp.	Thyme	
Groundcovers		
<i>Dymondia margaretae</i>	Silver carpet	
Vines		
<i>Hardenbergia violacea</i>	Lilac vine	
<i>Jasminum polyanthum</i>	Pink jasmine	
<i>Tecomaria capensis</i>	Cape honeysuckle	
<i>Wisteria</i> spp.	Wisteria	

Full Sun, Most Soils

Trees		
<i>Cercocarpus betuloides</i>	Mountain mahogany	●
Shrubs		
<i>Baccharis pilularis</i>	Coyote bush	●
<i>Buddleja davidii</i> and cultivars	Butterfly bush	
Perennials		
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow	●
<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Purple cone flower	
Groundcovers		
<i>Malvastrum</i>	Trailing mallow	
Vines		
<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	●



Sun to Part Shade, Most Soils

Trees		
<i>Aesculus californica</i>	California buckeye	●
<i>Cercis occidentalis</i>	Western redbud	●
Shrubs		
<i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>	Glossy abelia	
<i>Berberis</i> spp.	Barberry (avoid <i>Berberis darwinii</i> as it may be invasive)	
<i>Chaenomeles</i> spp.	Flowering quince	
<i>Mahonia</i> spp.	Mahonia, Oregon grape	●
<i>Malacothamnus</i> spp.	Bush mallow	● (certain species)
<i>Mimulus aurantiacus</i>	Sticky monkeyflower (prefers well drained, tolerates clay)	●
<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	Coffeeberry (some varieties prefer well-drained soil)	●
<i>Ribes sanguineum</i>	Red flowering currant	●
<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>	Blue elderberry	
Perennials		
<i>Calamagrostis foliosa</i>	Reed grass	●
<i>Festuca</i> spp.	Fescue bunch grass (avoid <i>Festuca arundinacea</i> as it may be invasive)	● (certain species)
<i>Iris douglasiana</i> (or Pacific Coast hybrids)	Douglas iris (some varieties prefer well-drained soil)	●
<i>Muhlenbergia rigens</i>	Deer grass	●
<i>Sesleria autumnalis</i>	Autumn moor grass	
<i>Sisyrinchium bellum</i>	Blue-eyed grass	●
<i>Tagetes lemmonii</i>	Mexican bush marigold	
Vines		
<i>Clytostoma callistegioides</i>	Violet trumpet vine	

Shade, Clay Soil with Some Organic Matter

Perennials		
<i>Dryopteris</i> spp.	Wood fern	● (certain species)
<i>Polystichum munitum</i>	Western sword fern	●

spp. = multiple species

*Considered poisonous. Classified as "Major Toxicity" by California Poison Control System 2010.



StopWaste's Online Resources

StopWaste has more information available online to help with your sheet mulching and gardening projects. Visit www.stopwaste.org/sheetmulch to find:

- List of sheet mulch vendors and suppliers
- Water rebate source list
- How-to videos
- Plant lists
- Success stories

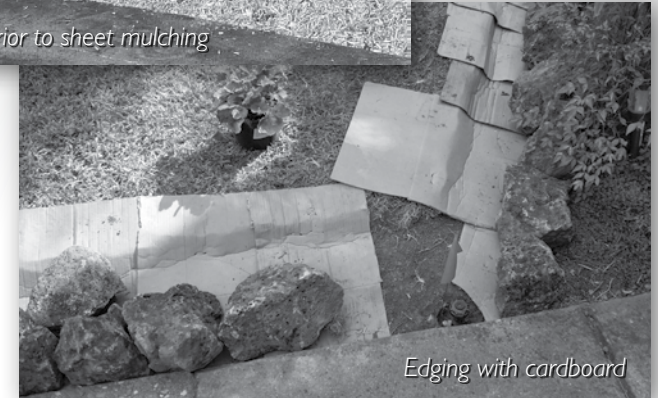
...and more!

StopWaste also has specialized plants lists available online at www.stopwaste.org/plantlists. These lists include:

- Alternatives to Bay Area Invasive Plants.
- Lawn Alternatives & Groundcovers
- Plants for Bay Area Plant communities
- Plants that Attract Butterflies
- Plants for Natural Hedges that Don't Need Shearing
- Plants for Vegetated Swales



Laying out plants prior to sheet mulching



Edging with cardboard



Stockpile your compost & mulch on top of a tarp



Spreading compost on top of cardboard



at home • at work • at school

1537 Webster Street
Oakland, CA 94612