

Bluestem Breezes
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Mulching the Garden

Mulching is my way of protecting the garden. From what, you say? Mulch keeps the soil from drying out so much when I leave for 4-H Camp and the County Fair. Mulch also protects the garden soil from my one and a half year old (hereby referred to as Person C), two puppies, a dog, and a cat.

You see, garden soil is great for toy trucks, digging, and burying. The cantaloupe and cucumber hills make great pillows for mid-day puppy naps. And, what's more fun than chasing each other down (and across!) rows?

K-State Specialist Ward Upham offers a few other benefits to mulching:

Soils are warm enough now that plants can benefit from mulching. Many plants prefer even levels of soil moisture and mulches provide such by preventing excessive evaporation. Other benefits of mulching include weed suppression, moderating soil temperatures and preventing the formation of a hard crust on the soil. Crusted soils restrict air movement into and out of the soil and slow the water infiltration rate.

Hay and straw mulches are very popular, but may contain weed or volunteer grain seeds. Grass clippings can also be used but should be applied as a relatively thin layer – only 2 to 3 inches thick. Clippings should also be dry as wet clipping can mold and become so hard that water can't pass through.

Also, do not use clippings from lawns that have been treated with a weed killer until some time has passed. With most types of weed killers, clippings from the fourth mowing after treatment may be used. If the lawn was treated with a product containing quinclorac (Drive), the clippings should not be used as mulch. If the weed killer used has a crabgrass killer, it likely contains quinclorac.

For additional information on mulching, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.