

BEST GARDENING PRACTICES

**WHEN IT COMES TO GARDENING
MULCH IS KING
& WHEN IT COMES TO MULCH
NOTHING BEATS
LUCERNE**

By the staff at General Marketing Service





If you ever wondered if it could be trendy to be a gardener, farmer or anyone who has a passion for growing things from the soil, then welcome to a new era where gardening is “ace”. The world wide environmental movement has allowed people in all cultures to feel cool again about having a garden and making it the most natural and productive garden possible. Not only does gardening save you money that might normally be spent driving to the market and buying mass-produced vegetables or flowers but it also provides you assurance that your salad is not covered with pesticides or fertilizers and it is as fresh as possible.

One of the most important requirements of a productive garden is mulching your soil. Chances are you’re already doing some type of mulching if you have a garden, but just in case you’re not, maybe it’s time to review some of the major benefits gained from mulching.

- 1 If you’re in any type of dry environment, and who isn’t in the middle of summer’s heat, then you should be mulching to conserve and retain soil moisture and conserve water.
- 2 If you hate pulling weeds then you will appreciate the fact that mulching eliminates most weeds. Should you find a weed or two; pulling them out of the mulch is easy compared to pulling weeds from hard soil.
- 3 When the rains do come, your mulch will prevent erosion, because it slows down the washing effect a hard rain can

produce and allows the water to slowly seep into the soil on top of your plants where it will do the most good.

- 4 In the middle of summer’s heat or winter’s cold mulch will moderate the soil temperature and make seasonal temperature changes less dramatic for the tender roots of your plants, veggies and flowers.
- 5 When you’re walking through your garden, you may not know it but you are packing down the soil with every step and making it harder for water to seep through to plant roots. Mulch reduces soil compacting from your footsteps.
- 6 Dinner Please! That’s what your plants say every time you add most types of mulch to the top of your garden soil because as mulch decomposes it adds valuable nutrients to the soil.

When it comes to mulch choices there are many options available. Although there are several man made options, most green gardeners opt for organic mulch which not only protects the soil and your plants but xxxxx also enriches the soil by providing precious vitamins and minerals as it decays. Furthermore, organic mulches can be tilled into the soil at the end of the planting season to increase the organic matter and water holding capacity of the soil.

The most popular organic mulches include: Compost; Straw; Saw Dust; Tree Bark Chips; Cocoa Shells; Coffee Grounds; Leaves; Peanut Shells; Peat Moss; Pine Needles; Ground Wood Chips; Newspaper; Grass Clippings; Manure; Sugar Cane and Lucerne (Alfalfa). Each mulch type mentioned above has its own special benefits and drawbacks. But in your efforts to improve your garden, make sure to watch out for mulches that can ruin your hard work.

One might think that any organic mulch is a good choice for your garden yet there are many hazards to consider when choosing which material to use. The wrong choice can all but ruin your garden if you're not careful. Mulch can contain bugs and diseases. It can wash away in heavy rains. It can cake up and repel the rain and never allow much of the surface-water reach the root structure. Some mulches have a bad smell and others are harmful to your pets and animals. A few mulches, while natural can release too much of the wrong minerals into your garden soil and hamper growth. Certain mulches can mold and some can take years to decompose.

Of all the mulch products available, Lucerne, otherwise known as alfalfa, is probably the king of the mulch pile. Organic gardeners

who are truly serious about what they grow are choosing Lucerne over all other mulch choices. Gardening experts around the country recommend Lucerne for many reasons. Primarily it is the significant vitamins and minerals found in Lucerne's raw product which can be passed on to your garden's soil and plants which has so many gardeners excited. Lucerne is originally grown as a legume that has a great deal of minerals including phosphorus, potassium, iron & calcium. It is protein rich and contains Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin D, vitamin E and Vitamin K. When gardeners use Lucerne on their beds their plants soak up the added nutrients and grow like never before. There are almost no other mulches that provide such a rich source of nourishment.

The Sydney Environmental and Soil Laboratory reports that Lucerne's nutritional soil chemistry effect is higher than animal manure (once considered to be the best mulch substance) "making Lucerne an excellent choice for both its physical and nutritional benefits in vegetable, rose and bedding gardens." The Laboratory recommends Lucerne for high value garden areas.

Another vital component of Lucerne is its capability to replenish significant amounts of carbon back into the soil. Most gardeners never consider such topics as soil chemistry when planning their garden, yet the health of the soil you plant your seeds in has everything to do with your garden's success. One of the key components of healthy soil is a high carbon content. Studies show years of cultivation substantially reduces the carbon & organic matter contents of many soils. Carbon degradation of soil can significantly lower its productivity by reducing root proliferation, lessen aeration, minimize water retention and water infiltration along with producing soil that is less erosion resistant. Soil that has lost most of its carbon content also retains fewer nutrients for plants to draw from. Lucerne's average Carbon/Nitrogen ratio is around

12:1 which makes it extremely valuable in helping your plants and vegetables draw the most moisture and nutrients from the soil.

a well mulched garden can yield 50% more than an unmulched garden of the same size. Another example of Lucerne's ability to improve soil chemistry comes from the Crop & Soil Sciences Department at the University of Michigan(USA). The 2-year study on various Lucerne mulches was performed to confirm general theories that Lucerne mulch had a positive impact on soil structure and water retention. Certain applications of Lucerne mulch increased saturated hydraulic conductivity (Ksat) by 57%, total and macroporosities by 1.7 and 1.8%, respectively, and (improved) water recharge rate of the soil profile by as much as 5.4% per day.

Lucerne works best on freshly cultivated weed-free soil and should be applied when plants can reach over the top of the mulch. No more than a 3" layer should be applied (after settling) and additional mulch should be applied as the initial layer decomposes. If possible apply your Lucerne mulch after a light rain when the soil is moist. If your soil is dry you should irrigate before applying your Lucerne. According to USA's Texas Agricultural Extension Service a well

mulched garden can yield 50% more than an unmulched garden of the same size. Using Lucerne helps ensure those kinds of results. Still another benefit of Lucerne is that it decomposes much faster than many other mulch types so the nutrients get into the soil faster and your plants respond more rapidly when mulched with Lucerne. A good number of gardeners still feed their plot to supplement the natural nutritional effects of Lucerne mulch.



Here are some comments about Lucerne from visitors to the popular "The Garden Web" website:

"I've just mulched new native beds with Lucerne and I'd agree in giving it my top vote. It is economical and easier to spread than sugar cane."

Another visitor says

"I love Lucerne. The smell when wet is fantastic."

While in some circles Lucerne is labeled as "the expensive mulch," those same reviewers usually admit it is the best mulch product. But when a smart gardener adds up equipment costs, water, labor hours and all the other efforts to get their garden to grow properly, it only makes sense to use mulch that will provide the largest yield for your efforts? Furthermore, when you consider the high cost of flowers, fruits and vegetables, the small added cost of premium mulch makes all the sense in the world.

In an era that has become ecologically driven and the idea of having a home garden is not only economical but a "good thing" to do for the environment gardeners across Australia are looking for ways to maximize their effort. So they till, they plant, they water and when it is time to mulch. They choose the gold standard; Lucerne.



For more information on Lucerne products, contact Manuka Chaff Pty Ltd. or visit www.manukachaff.com.au