

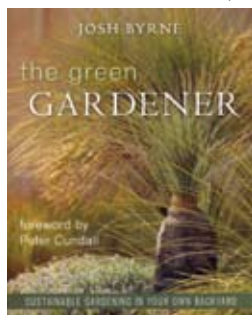


Before mulching:

- Remove any grass, weeds and dead plants from the garden.
- Put in any new plants.
- If installing an irrigation system, such as a drip system, do so before mulching.
- Water the area thoroughly.

MULCHING TIPS

- Free mulch (shredded green waste) is often available from your local council. It can also be purchased cheaply from commercial tree loppers. Mulch Net is a local Perth company that arranges free mulch deliveries from tree lopping contractors (for more info visit www.mulchnet.com).



Text from *The Green Gardener* by Josh Byrne © Penguin Group (Australia). The Living Smart brand has been developed by The Meeting Place Community Centre, the City of Fremantle, Murdoch University and Southern Metropolitan Regional Council to support a suite of programs developing capacity in community sustainability. Published by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, Perth, Western Australia. February 2008. The information provided in this brochure is provided in good faith. However the accuracy or appropriateness of the information is not guaranteed.

WHY

BENEFITS	MULCHING
Improves moisture and nutrient retention in the soil	✓
Suppresses weeds	✓
Encourages microbiological activity	✓
Makes plants healthier	✓
Looks great	✓
Prevents soil erosion in windy areas	✓
Reduces the water needs of your plants, helping you save water	✓

SOIL CONDITIONING AND MULCHING

Water is becoming an increasingly precious resource as Perth experiences its driest years on record. The average Perth household uses around half of their water in the garden, which makes it a great place to start saving water. Adding soil conditioner to your garden beds and pots along with a layer of coarse mulch can help you create a thriving, water-efficient garden.

SOIL CONDITIONING WHAT CAN I DO?

Western Australian soils are generally weathered and infertile. Most of us living in or near Perth are gardening on Swan Coastal Plain soils which typically have low water holding capacity and become water repellent when dry. Native plants have adapted to these soil conditions and typically need little soil conditioning. To grow other plants such as ornamentals or food crops you need to improve the soil so that it retains nutrients and moisture and allows your plants to develop a healthy root system.

A well conditioned soil:

- Is filled with plenty of organic matter and abundant soil life.
- Has a pH (soil acidity/alkalinity) neutral to slightly acidic (pH 6-7).
- Free draining while still able to retain moisture and nutrients.

The secret to a flourishing garden is well prepared soil...so be ready to get your hands dirty! The first rule of successful, low maintenance gardening is to feed the soil, not the plants. A well conditioned soil will support plants without the need for regular applications of chemical fertilisers, which can quickly leach through our sandy soils and contaminate groundwater and water ways.



JOSH BYRNE
sustainable gardening specialist and popular media personality provides advice on soil conditioning and mulching for a waterwise and healthy garden.





HOW DO I DO IT?

To improve the quality of your soil, add organic matter such as:

- Compost – make your own with a range of organic household materials, with the added benefit of reducing your household waste.
- Worm castings – become a worm ‘farmer’ and get your ‘workers’ to create this wonderful soil enhancer.
- Aged animal manures (e.g. chicken, sheep, cow, horse) – these are great for growing veggies and other hungry exotic plants. Remember that manure is nutrient rich and should be used lightly. It may also harm some native plants. There are specialist slow release fertilisers for natives – just ask your local nursery for further advice.
- Packaged organic fertilisers (e.g. blood and bone, chicken manure pellets and liquid organic fertilisers) – these feed your plants and also improve the soil (just follow the product recommendations).
- Feeding mulches (such as pea straw or lucerne hay) – these break down to improve the soil.

Organic matter can be dug in prior to planting or laid on top of soil in an already established garden. Either way, it will break down and improve your soil. Always add soil conditioners prior to planting and at least twice a year to established plants. Check your soil pH with a kit from your local nursery. Most plants prefer a pH of around 6-7. If your soil is not within this range, the local nursery will be able to recommend an appropriate product to achieve a balanced pH level.

Remove all weeds from your garden area – weeds compete with plants for soil nutrients and water. Apply wetting agent to your soil in early Spring and late Summer to counter Perth’s water repellent soil.

WHY

BENEFITS	SOIL CONDITIONING
Improves soil structure as well as moisture and nutrient retention	✓
Encourages microbiological activity	✓
Makes plants healthier	✓
Reduces the water needs of your plants, helping you save water	✓

MULCHING

WHAT CAN I DO?

There are 3 types of mulches - feeding mulch (such as pea straw, shredded lupins or lucerne hay), woody mulch (such as wood chips or prunings), and permanent mulch (such as pebbles).

Good waterwise mulches have coarse and irregular texture, allowing water to penetrate

and the soil to breathe, whilst reducing evaporation and keeping the soil cool.

Soft mulches (such as feeding mulch) break down rapidly to feed the soil and need topping up regularly. These are suited for fruit trees, vegetable gardens and other hungry plants.

Woody mulches are better suited to deeper rooted hardy plants (such as natives) and are ideal for exposed areas as they are less likely to blow away.

Permanent mulches are mainly used for landscaping effects but also play an important role in retaining soil moisture. These are best suited to plants that have modest feeding requirements and don’t drop leaves (such as succulents).

HOW DO I DO IT?

Mulch is best applied at the end of winter or the beginning of spring while the ground is moist from winter rain and before the hot, drying winds of summer.

Condition your soil prior to mulching, lay mulch around your plants (keeping clear of the stem) in a layer about 5-10cm thick. Coarse woody mulch should be reapplied annually.