



# WISCONSIN FOOD FORESTS

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## Sheet Mulching

Sheet mulching, also called composting in place, sheet composting, and lasagna gardening, has many names and just as many variations.

But here's the basic idea: instead of pulling out sod, tilling or digging the soil, and incorporating compost or manure to create a garden bed, sheet mulching builds the soil on top of what's already there. The process, then, is one of construction rather than disruption.

Sheet mulching and other forms of no-till farming are all related by the effort to grow crops without disturbing the soil. They're trying to prevent the damage done by tilling, a common practice which mixes soil profiles, kills important soil organisms, and often causes erosion. Instead, thick layers of organic matter are applied right on top of untouched soil, mimicking the leaf litter layer in a forest which prevents weed seeds from sprouting, holds in water, and provides a home for many soil organisms.

You need a little mental tweak to think like a sheet mulcher: instead of picturing what you need to remove from a certain spot of field or lawn to build a garden bed, you think about what you can pile on top of it that will smother the weeds and break down, over the course of some months, to build a rich, loose soil. The process more closely mimics nature's soil-building process. Imagine a forest floor covered with leaves, rotting logs, decomposing plants, seeds, and animal scat. Sheet mulching works with instead of against natural processes, and therefore might save effort, especially in the long-run.

Whereas sheet mulching does not bring instant gratification, given that a bed requires months of waiting until it is ready for planting, it certainly can satisfy a desire to treat the soil well. Mulching builds soil over time, in contrast with the quick but short-term flood of nutrients brought to the surface through tilling.

Let's refer you to our friend Rob Frost's blog, where he has a fine post (with pictures and everything) about [sheet mulching](#).