

# We Got It Covered

## Mulching the Garden

*Mulching is the process of covering the soil with materials that will slow the evaporation of water, inhibit weed growth, and keep the soil cool.*

**Purpose:** To conserve moisture, keep weeds down, and keep the soil cool in mid-summer.

**Discovery Question:** How do we reduce the amount of watering and weeding needed during the growing season?

**Materials:** Organic mulches—bark mulch, wood chips, composted leaves, sawdust, grass clippings, straw, and cocoa mulch; Inorganic mulches—newspaper, cardboard, old rugs, and plastic.

### Procedure:

1. Thoroughly weed all of the garden beds that are to be mulched.
2. Carefully place the mulching material around your plants. Completely cover the soil all around the plants, making sure the mulch does not touch the stems of the plants. Generally, organic mulches should be two to four inches deep for best results.
3. Keep track of the mulch levels through the course of the season. The organic mulches will break down eventually, and will need to be replenished periodically (about every four weeks) in order to keep the mulch depth at two to four inches.

### Extension:

**Comparing Mulches.** Compare organic versus inorganic mulch (i.e., grass clippings versus cocoa mulch). Set up different test plots in the garden to test the effectiveness of various mulches. Place the different mulches around the same type of plants. Place wood chips around tomatoes in one bed, and cardboard around tomatoes in another. Compare the results.

Factors to test include: effectiveness in inhibiting weeds, promoting plant growth, and preventing fungal diseases and pests, and making cost comparisons.

After a year, compare soils that used different mulches to see if the soil nutrient content is the same or different.

Check underneath the mulches to see which creatures are living off the different kinds of mulches. Are they different? How? Why? Record your findings in the Garden Log Book.

