Mulch is a way of using plant residue and added plant materials to keep the ground covered for the purpose of water management, reducing soil erosion, and improving soil quality. As the mulch materials break down, they become a source of organic matter that improves soil texture and water infiltration while providing important plant nutrients and nurturing soil biology. Crops can be planted into the mulch to help avoid disturbing the soil and to aid in weed management. “Green manure” is the process of planting certain crops specifically with the intention of using the residue as mulch and soil amendment. Animal manure is used as a natural fertilizer that can help nurture soil biology and the health and productivity of the crops grown on those lands. Manure management practices are needed for environmental safety but can be reduced or eliminated by using managed grazing techniques.

**Benefits**

- Adds organic matter to the soil and keeps it covered
- Improves degraded soil
- Improves soil microbiology
- Improves water infiltration & retention
- Reduces or eliminates fertilizer use
- Mulch can help suppress weeds and regulate soil temperature
- Increases crop yields
- Increases carbon sequestration
- Provides an efficient way to deal with farm waste

**Potential Considerations**

- Choose mulch materials with care—some might introduce weed seeds or provide a breeding ground for pests
- Avoid over-thick or tightly packed mulch that can create soggy anaerobic conditions
- Animal manure can raise the acidity of the soil over time—soil test to keep track
- Animal manure must be well-composted and managed to avoid disease and run-off that could pollute waterways
- Space and time needed to compost animal manure or the expense to buy it
Resources

**NRCS Conservation Practice Standard and Specifications Mulching (Acre) Code 484**

**Mulches for Organic Farming**
USDA NRCS Conservation Job Sheet 484.1
https://bit.ly/3x7Belk

**Restoring the Soil**

**Tipsheet: Manure in Organic Production Systems**

**Animal Manure Management**
The importance of manure management and how to do it right. From USDA NRCS. https://bit.ly/3pwXrqo

**Managed Grazing as an Alternative Manure Management Strategy**

Research


Learn more about soil amendments at The Center for Regenerative Agriculture and Resilient Systems https://bit.ly/3oBjzj8