GEORGESON BOTANICAL GARDEN

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS

**University of Alaska Fairbanks**
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# Who Wants to Weed, Anyway?

by
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This summer, we began a study to determine the effectiveness of mulching with fresh grass clippings as a means of weed control. This study was initiated by our Monday night volunteers who were getting mighty sick of weeding. They used grass clipping mulch to control weeds in their own gardens, so why didn't we do the same?

We didn't have a good answer, so we decided to try the mulch for ourselves. We set up four sets of mulched and unmulched plots (randomized complete block design for those who are interested in statistics). We planted "Inca Yellow" marigolds at the recommended spacing of eight inches. Throughout the season, we measured soil temperature, moisture, plant growth, bloom time and labor required for maintenance of unmulched (control) and mulched plots.

The results of the study have not been analyzed yet, but some preliminary observations can be made. Soil temperatures appeared to be slightly lower and soil moisture slightly higher in the mulched plots, at least early in the season before the marigolds had spread so much that they completely shaded the soil in both plots. However, there were no observable differences in growth rates or flowering times for marigolds grown in mulched and unmulched plots.

The amount of labor required to apply mulch to the plots was equal to the extra labor required to keep unmulched plots weeded. On balance, it appears that there was no net gain or loss in terms of labor for mulching or weeding. However, we must note that these plots were in an area that had previously been planted in annual rye grass. Consequently, there were far fewer weeds than in most of our plots. In addition, the vigorous growth of the marigolds soon completely covered both plots, and weed growth may have been slowed or prevented because of shade.

We plan to conduct this study on a larger scale next year, and will also include some vegetables that are susceptible to white mold rot. Perhaps by covering the soil with a mulch, damage from the the soil-borne disease might be minimized. Visit the garden next summer to see for yourself.

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