

summer care of your garden

The hot summer months can be a struggle for any garden. Three secrets to keeping it looking lush and healthy are; soil preparation before planting, regular mulching and good water management.

Preparing your garden

Preparing your soil in early spring is crucial to the health of your summer garden. Improving the soil structure by mixing in plenty of organic matter like **Daltons Enriched Compost** to your existing soil will add nutrition and improve its water holding capacities.

- 1 Firstly remove any old or dead plants and weeds, ensuring that any diseased winter crops are removed from the property and kept out of the compost bin – this is so you do not re-infect your summer crops.
- 2 Apply a generous layer of **Daltons Enriched Compost**, **Daltons Garden Time™ Compost** or **Daltons Big Value Blood & Bone** and thoroughly dig it into the soil, working it in to 1.5 spade depth. This ensures the soil has been fully aerated, improving the organic matter, nutrient content and microbial activity.
- 3 If growing in raised planters or gardens, fill up the area with **Daltons Premium Garden Mix**. Water thoroughly prior to planting (see Water Management on page 2).
- 4 After planting apply your first layer of mulch. Re-apply when and where required depending on the type of mulch used (see below).

Planting Trees And Shrubs

Even trees and shrubs can struggle in the drier months and they are often forgotten when it comes to regular watering. Give them extra hydration by using **Daltons Besgrow Hydromat** when planting your tree or shrub.

- 1 Cut the **Daltons Besgrow Hydromat** to shape (if necessary), place at the base of the planting hole and hydrate with water.
- 2 Place the plant on top of **Daltons Besgrow Hydromat** and refill the hole with **Daltons Premium Garden Mix** then water well. Add **Daltons Premium Planter Tabs** for up to 12 months supply of fertiliser.
- 3 For best results add a layer of **Daltons Mulch & Grow** around the base of the plant which will help with weed suppression and moisture retention. (Never let mulch touch the trunk of the tree. Against the tree's trunk, organic material generates heat as it decomposes, which can kill bark tissue.)

Mulching

Regular mulching is a must and it will help you maintain a lush healthy garden.

Mulch is usually a form of organic matter that is applied as a layer on top of your soil in your garden around plants, trees, and especially in your pots, to help protect them against the elements throughout the seasons.

Practically any organic material can be used for mulching, some examples are: bark, straw, newspaper, seaweed, deciduous tree leaves collected in autumn.

Some loss of nutrients can occur if you use certain products such as wood chips as mulch. To help the problem, apply a generous layer of **Daltons Big Value Blood & Bone** to your soil and mix it in well before applying any mulch. Some people put down a layer of newspaper before they add their organic mulches – just don't make the layer too thick.

You can purchase bulk or bagged mulch from your local garden centre, like **Daltons Mulch & Grow**, which is ready to apply straight onto your garden.

When to apply mulch?

Timing the application of mulch onto your garden is very important and depends on where you live in New Zealand. The key is not to apply it too early or you risk locking in the cold moist soils of winter – it's better to wait until soil temperatures have risen. In the colder areas of New Zealand; such as parts of the South Island, apply mulch in mid-late November. In warmer regions mulch can be applied from late October/early November.

How much to apply?

When applying mulch to a new garden, tree or plant, the thickness of the mulch should be enough to prevent the growth of weeds. Do not make the layer too thick as it will stop or hinder the penetration of water to the roots of the plants that are being mulched. The exact measurement does depend on the type of mulch being used, with the important factor being its permeability (allowing water penetration). As a guide, a good layer of **Daltons Mulch & Grow** should be applied approximately 50-100mm thick around plants.

Professional tips with Xanthe White

"Maintain your mulch layer and get it on early in the season prior to summer once soils have warmed up."



Benefits of Mulching

Top reasons you should be adding mulch to your garden:

- 1 A thick (50-100mm) layer of mulch around your plants will help suppress weeds. This means your plants are not competing for root space and nutrients. Create a clean slate and remove all weeds before applying mulch.
- 2 Mulch shields plants sensitive roots from the elements, especially during the colder and drier months. It keeps them covered and protected.
- 3 Valuable nutrients are added to the soil as organic mulches break down over time. They improve the soil quality and structure by encouraging micro-organisms and worm activity.
- 4 Organic mulches aid water retention by hindering water evaporation, keeping the moisture in the soil. This is particularly important on exceptionally hot or windy days and prevents plants from wilting.
- 5 Soil temperatures are regulated by the added layer of mulch; in warmer months it keeps the soil cooler, and in colder months insulates plants and their roots. Consistent even soil temperatures also help extend the growing season and harvesting period and reduce plant stress.
- 6 Watering onto mulch versus bare ground limits the soil splash onto your fruit or vegetable crops, keeping them cleaner. For instance regularly applying mulch around strawberry plants will keep fruit clean, dry and off the soil, therefore reducing the risk of fruit rot.
- 7 Mulching helps prevent nutrients from being leached from the soil; for instance if a down pour occurs then mulch absorbs this excess water and releases it at a more regulated rate.
- 8 A good layer of mulch encourages plant roots to penetrate deep into the soil in search of nutrients and water, promoting healthy strong plant growth.

How Often to Renew Mulch?

Mulch should be re-applied annually or seasonally depending on the type of mulch you use. You may need to re-apply it two or three times during the growing season; for instance if you use pea straw it will need to be applied more frequently as it breaks down faster, compared with a bark based mulch.

Don't forget to fertilise your plants in spring or autumn depending on what you have growing in your garden and how often you are watering (some plants are gross feeders and may require more applications). Daltons have a wide range of fertilisers available designed to meet all garden fertiliser needs, and include specialised mixes for flowers, acid loving plants, shrubs and trees, tomatoes, citrus, strawberry, vegetables, fruit trees, berries, and potatoes and sweet potatoes. Always ensure that your applied fertiliser is watered in well.

Water Management

You can't survive without water, and neither can your garden. The success of your summer garden will largely depend on the careful monitoring of water supply to your plants.



Top Watering Tips

- 1 Be regular when watering your garden, little and often is best, avoiding the hottest part of the day when plants are heat stressed. Once a day in the early morning or evening up to three times a week should be plenty.
- 2 Use **Besgrow Coir Fibre Briquettes** around the root zone of your plants to improve moisture retention.
- 3 Some plants such as roses do require deep watering to encourage deep root development. So apply extra water to those plant types in the early part of the day.
- 4 Water until it begins to puddle on top of the soil which means the soil has reached its water holding capacity.
- 5 Avoid getting foliage wet as this can promote the spread of disease on plants like tomatoes and roses. Aim for the root zone instead.
- 6 Don't over water – too much of anything is not good. If there has been plenty of rainfall you will not need to water as regularly.
- 7 With many plants (trees and shrubs particularly) if they are not watered well and regularly over the hotter summer months, they will stop growing. If you maintain a consistent regime then you can expect excellent results with continued growth through the hot summer months. This is critical when establishing a new garden as you want plants to grow to maturity as soon as possible.

Don't Forget Pots and Containers

Plants grown in pots dry out more quickly and need to be watered regularly (until the water appears in the saucer). It is important to check that there are adequate drainage holes in the container prior to planting (if not add more), and avoid having the pot sitting continuously in wet conditions eg directly on the ground.

When planting into pots, keep the level of soil slightly lower so you have enough room for a layer of mulch on top to help with moisture retention and stop them drying out.

Gardening Terms Explained

- Deciduous trees** Trees that shed their leaves every season.
- Leaching** A loss of water-soluble nutrients from the soil by over irrigating or by excessive rainfall.
- Mulching** A top layer of organic matter so the soil and plant are protected.
- Foliage** Leaves of a plant.



Products to try

Daltons Premium Planter Tabs | Daltons Big Value Blood & Bone | Daltons Garden Time™ Compost
Daltons Premium Garden Mix | Daltons Mulch & Grow | Daltons Enriched Compost
Daltons Besgrow Hydromat | Besgrow Coir Fibre Briquette