Cultivating Vegetables: Mulching

Mulching means to over the soil between plants with a layer of material.

What to use as a mulch

• Use materials that cost little or nothing.

• Use fairly coarse material.

• Do not remove crop residue, but leave it on the land.

• Ordinary veld grass is also a very good mulch.

• Other examples are leaves, soft cuttings, seaweed, straw, tree bark and manure.

• All these mulches can be dug into the soil when the season is over.
• The material must be fairly well decomposed before it is dug in. When undecayed material is dug in, it uses some of the nutrients in the soil.

• Even flat stones can be used as a mulch.

Advantages of mulching

• It prevents water from evaporating. Less watering is therefore needed.

• It protects the soil from wind, rain and sun.

• Weed growth is suppressed because the sunlight is blocked out.

• Soil does not spatter on the leaves during watering.

• It keeps roots and bulbs cool in summer and warm in winter.

• If manure or compost is used, the nutrients they contain will be washed into the soil by rain and watering, providing food for the micro-organisms in the soil and for the plants.

• It lessens greening of roots and bulbs.

• It reduces erosion.

Disadvantages of mulching

• Sometimes cutworms and other insects find shelter in the mulch.

• It may prevent seeds from germinating if it is placed on the ground too soon.
For further information contact your nearest provincial department of agriculture