



A FARMER'S SAY >

By Michael J. Ssali

Mulching is key

The practice of covering the soil with organic matter in a garden is referred to as mulching.

The materials used to cover the soil such as dry grass, banana leaves, maize stalk, eucalyptus tree branches, coffee husks or any other crop left-over material are referred to as mulch.

If well practiced, mulching is one of the most efficient ways of protecting the soil and improving its fertility.

Mulching improves rainfall infiltration and water retention in the soil.

Mulching further reduces the rates of surface evaporation, facilitates the conservation of water in the soil, and keeps the crops strong and growing even during the dry period.

When the soil surface is covered with mulch the rain drops do not hit it directly and therefore there is minimal chance for soil erosion by water run-off or even by strong wind during the dry season.

Since the ground is covered all the time there is very little chance for weeds to grow.

The farmer therefore is spared the effort and expenses that would be spent on fighting weeds.

By keeping the soil moist, mulching facilitates the activities of the tiny microorganisms such as termites and earthworm which naturally live in the soil to carry out the needed soil structure improvements.

With the passing of time, the mulch decomposes and may need to be replaced.

However to the farmer this is no loss because the decomposition of any organic matter on the soil surface in the garden results in increased soil fertility and crop yield.

By continuous mulching the farmer keeps the garden fertile and productive.

However the farmer practicing mulching must guard against bush fires especially during the dry season.

The organic material used for mulching should not be seeded or the type which sprouts as it may introduce weeds in the garden.

Using dry mulching material would be the best option. The farmer walking in a mulched garden must always pay a lot of attention where he steps as sometimes dangerous snakes hide in the mulch.

In some cases mulching encourages the presence of pests including banana weevils which destroy crops.

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