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Weed cloth

Installing weed cloth (aka landscape fabric) suppresses invasive weeds around new plants. As opposed to black plastic, fabric blocks only light while allowing air and water penetration. Weed cloth costs more than black plastic, but it is sturdier and large pieces can be reused, even after a few years. However, both are made from non-renewable petroleum products, and should be used only after considering more sustainable alternatives. Non-woven weed cloth is cheaper, but woven cloth is stronger and allows better air and water penetration. Weed cloth may be installed around individual plants, placed in long strips to permit mowing and other maintenance in between, or installed as a large blanket to smother all the weeds in a large area.

Install weed cloth using galvanized landscaping staples. Six-inch staples are the most common size, and sufficient for most needs. Use 8" staples to penetrate thick reed canarygrass or hold in very soft ground. Cloth should lay flat against the ground to prevent weeds from gaining purchase underneath. Cut edges of woven cloth will eventually fray, so be sure to place staples at least 1-2" away from the cut edges.

Pre-cut weed cloth

Weed cloth may be purchased in pre-cut squares or circles, usually 2' or 3' across, to place around individual plants. Pre-cut weed cloth typically has an "X" shaped slit in the center, for the plant. Buy the largest size available that will fit into your plant spacing scheme. If the plant is too large to feed through the center slit, cut the slit through to an edge. Overlap each side of the cut edge at least 2", stapling through the overlapped cloth at the center and the outer edge. Install one staple close to the plant customizing the center hole to fit. Pull out each corner of the square and staple firmly. Each weed cloth will require at least 6 staples.

Weed cloth strips

Weed cloth comes in rolls of various widths. To allow mowing between rows, first install plants in relatively straight rows at least 5-6' apart. Next, roll out the weed cloth alongside a row of plants and staple down one end. Starting at the end, pull the fabric tight and cut a slit to slide around the stem of the first plant. Pull the fabric around the plant and staple the cut edges, overlapping at least 2". Staple once on the outer edge and once nearer to the plant stem. Move to the next plant and repeat. When you finish stapling one edge, move to the other side and pull and pleat as necessary to ensure good fabric-to-soil contact.

Continuous weed cloth barrier

While only feasible for small weed populations on projects that allow significant lead-time, this approach to weed control can pay off in the long run. For most weeds, the population should be covered for three to five years. The perimeter should be periodically monitored for new sprouts, which should be controlled immediately. These new individuals are most likely physically connected to the existing population. This approach is most effective when herbicide is not an option, for the following weeds: field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), hedge bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*), and reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinaceae*).

Weed cloth maintenance and removal

Monitor the progress of the plantings, and loosen or remove weed cloth that starts to get tight around the plant stems; otherwise it can girdle the stems. Be sure to remove all weed cloth after the weeds are controlled and new plants established. You may want to remove weed cloth sooner around native species that spread from root suckers, such as roses and snowberry, if you notice suckers trying to sprout around the edges of the weed cloth. Take care not to damage the plants as you remove the weed cloth, and spread woody mulch over the newly exposed bare ground, if possible.

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