



Step #4: Shield the Soil.

Keep all soil covered; a bare soil is a vulnerable soil. Your underground workforce needs to be protected, so that their environment is not too hot, too cold, too wet, or too dry.

Here are some tips for shielding your soil:

- The best cover is a growing plant (see Step #2).

But as that may not be feasible for areas between plantings, or when your plants are very young and don't cover much area, here's what you can do:

- You can cover bare soil with plant residues, compost, or organic mulches. These materials will also feed your workforce.
- You can also use inorganic mulches, such as stones, crushed rock or brick, or plastic weed-block. Some heat-loving plants respond well to black sheet plastic as a mulch.
- Some gardeners like to use corrugated cardboard. You can cover the entire bed, cutting holes where you want to plant seedlings or place seeds. The cardboard protects the soil, keeps weeds at bay, and eventually breaks down and feeds your microbial workforce.

