5 Cheap Weed Barrier Alternatives

I’m very forgiving when it comes to weeds. But because I use the square foot gardening method and garden in raised beds, I rarely have to deal with many invading plants. Still, there

are some spots in my garden when I need to keep weeds out. Since landscaping fabric is pricey, I stick to these cheap weed barrier alternatives instead.

Cheap Weed Barrier Alternatives

Here are some of my favorite cheap weed barrier alternatives—some won't even cost you a dime!

What's a weed barrier, you ask? Weed barriers are often placed at the bottom of a garden box or bed. After you place the barrier, you pile on the dirt, plant your seeds or starts, and you're all set. The barrier ensures that weeds and grabby nearby tree roots don't invade your garden and steal nutrients.

But weed barriers, especially landscape fabric, can be expensive. So here are a few frugal ways to keep out weeds without hurting your wallet.

Cardboard

When I started my current garden, I was so excited to add dirt to my brand-new raised beds that I completely forgot to add a weed barrier layer. Fast forward a year or two, and my plants ended up battling nearby cedar roots for nutrients.

What a disaster!

Over time, as the dirt level decreased, I decided to add a layer of cardboard and start from scratch with a new batch of soil, compost, and vermiculite. Since then, I've had way fewer problems with nutrient deficiencies. I also learned a valuable lesson: always use a weed barrier!

Plus, using cardboard is a great way to get rid of boxes piling up in your house. If your recycling bin can't handle the volume of packages you receive in the mail, consider using that cardboard in the garden. Ideally, you'll add a few layers

for good measure.

Mulch

If you don't have access to cardboard or can't afford landscape fabric, mulch is a great way to keep weeds at bay. My favorite type of mulch is straw or coco coir. By suffocating weed seed, mulch ensures your plants get all the light and nutrients.

If you want free mulch, consider asking nearby farms if they have any extra straw they can give away. Or, shred fallen autumnal leaves for mulch. Leaf mold is both a free and eco-friendly mulch!

Newspaper

Another cheap weed barrier alternative is newspaper. Of course, you'll need to be getting the newspaper for this to be a cheap solution. You wouldn't want to have to subscribe just to use the weekly news report as a weed barrier in the garden.

(But I'm strongly for supporting local journalism enterprises! So if you're on the fence about subscribing, you should know that you can indeed use newspaper as mulch and a weed barrier.

Rocks

When I moved into my home, the front yard garden was filled with small rocks. I hated them with a passion. I tried hard to remove them, but I quickly realized that doing so was going to be harder than I thought. Since then, I've used the tiny rocks as a weed barrier for smaller garden areas. What I like about rocks as a weed barrier is that they are great for improving drainage in an area that's otherwise prone to getting waterlogged.

If you have an abundance of gravel from a landscaping project, consider using it as a bottom layer for your garden beds. If

you use rocks, though, make sure you're sure about your garden's placement. They're a pain to remove!

Burlap

Burlap is a little pricier than the other options on this list, but it's more eco-friendly than landscaping fabric. And, if you know someone who has recently had a shabby-chic wedding, ask them if you can have their leftover burlap tablecloths. Order Burlap here.