



# Weed Management for Young 'Ulu Trees

**Weed management** is critical to ensuring the long-term health and vitality of young breadfruit ('ulu) trees. Below is a summary of Hawai'i farmers' views and recommendations on different weed management strategies they've tried.

## Mowing \$

**Description:** Cutting and removing vegetation around the trees, typically using mechanical equipment.

**Cost:**

- New riding mowers cost from \$1,800 to \$5,000
- New trimmers and edgers cost from \$90 to \$650
- Factor in labor and time, including mower maintenance

**Frequency:** • Every 2 to 4 weeks

**Efficacy:** • Use mowing alone or in combination with other methods such as mulching or weed mat.

**Disadvantages:** Mowing in some form is practically a requirement for young tree establishment in Hawai'i, as without it weeds and grasses will overtake trees and suppress their growth, and can even cause tree mortality if left unchecked.



## Weed Mat \$\$

**Description:** Weed Mat, also known as landscape fabric, is a barrier designed to suppress weed growth. The mat blocks sunlight, while still allowing water, nutrients, and air to pass through for tree growth.

**Cost:**

- Varies upon tree spacing, but typically \$50 for 4'x100' of material, including landscape staples
- Factor in labor and time costs for each additional application

**Frequency:** • Reapply quarterly or as needed when the weed mat material has deteriorated

**Efficacy:**

- Use in addition to other methods such as mulching and mowing
- Use caution when mowing around the weed mat to avoid damage

**Disadvantages:** Must pay higher attention when mowing and weed whacking to avoid weed mat damage; also, weed mat material cannot be composted or recycled, so is less environmentally friendly.



**Questions? Need help?** Contact the Hawai'i 'Ulu Cooperative at

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# Mulching \$\$\$

- Description:** Mulching is the process of covering the soil with local green materials to benefit plants by suppressing weed growth and adding nutrients to the soil around the young trees. For this trial, 4-6" of mulch was spread from the tree base up to the drip line after being cleared of weeds and grasses.
- Cost:**
- Can vary by source, but typically \$35-\$45 per application
  - Factor in labor and transport costs for each additional application
- Frequency:**
- Reapply quarterly or as needed when mulch has decomposed
- Efficacy:**
- Use in addition to other methods, like mowing
  - Hawai'i farmers recommend using: palm leaves, macadamia branches, wood chips, gliricida branches, and grass clippings
- Disadvantages:** Mulching materials can attract feral pigs to trees, leading to tree damage and even mortality if trees are not well protected. However, one farmer who used palm fronds for mulch noticed that feral pigs were less likely to cause root damage to the young 'ulu trees as this material was thicker and more difficult to penetrate.



## Other Considerations

In addition to the advantages and disadvantages of each technique outlined above, other factors may affect the success or failure of young breadfruit plantings. These include microclimate and soil substrate, weather like wind or drought, and the size of the farm.

**Here are some of our farmers thoughts about their experience with weed management techniques in different locations:**

*"Weed mats actually are the most labor intensive, because I have to keep the grass from intruding across it with a weed whacker. I can't use the mower because it can get stuck...my blade caught the plastic and that was a nightmare. I'd have to weed-whack every two weeks, and I just couldn't keep up."*



*"Weed mats are too expensive. Eventually the weeds are going to grow through them anyway. Then, if you get relaxed on the mowing it grows over [and] can get caught in the mower."*



*"If I'm mowing, if I have time, I'll do a pass where I go back and ...shoot the grass clippings around the trunk."*



*"If I had to do this again I would just mulch and not irrigate and hope the trees get enough rain"*



*"I preferred the mulch. I tried to stick with quarterly application but felt it was easier for me to maintain when the mulch disintegrated. I was able to weed whack and reapply."*



**Scan to watch a video overview**

