

Proper Mulching Techniques

There are many opportunities to provide trees, shrubs, and flower beds mulch. Although mulching has many benefits, such as helping to reduce soil moisture loss and minimizing weed germination and growth, there is a tendency to misuse this beneficial landscaping resource.

Mulch is available in a variety of forms, organic and inorganic. Inorganic mulch includes pulverized rubber, lava rock, different types of stone geotextile fabric and other materials. Inorganic mulch does not decompose and does not need to be replenished often. However, this type of mulch does not improve soil structure, provide nutrients, or add organic materials. As such, most horticulturists and arborists prefer organic mulches.

Organic mulch includes wood chips, softwood bark, cocoa hulls, leaves, compost mixes, pine needles and other products typically derived from plants. These mulches decompose in the landscape at various rates depending on the material, climate, and the different microorganisms present.

The single, highest complaint related to mulching is a technique referred to in the landscaping industry as “volcanic mulch”. This occurs when mulch is piled high against the trunk of a young tree. This mulching technique may create habitats for rodents that chew the bark and may cause girdling of the tree. While there is much to gain from mulching, follow these application methods to ensure the proper health of your landscape plants.

- ✓ **Make certain there is proper soil drainage.**
- ✓ **Use the correct mulch for your plant material. Some plants may benefit from slightly acidic mulch such as pine bark.**
- ✓ **For well drained sites, apply only 2-4” layers. If poorly drained, apply less. Coarse mulches can be applied slightly deeper.**
- ✓ **Place mulch out to the edge of a tree’s crown or drip line.**
- ✓ **If mulch is already present, check for depth. If sufficient mulch is present, break up any matted layers with a rake or your hands and apply a bit more to refresh the look.**
- ✓ **If mulch is piled against the stems or tree trunks, pull it back several inches to ensure the base is exposed. This provides a method for direct hose and/or soaker watering.**

This time of the year you can find great buys on mulch. Keep your eyes open for the \$5 bags and especially the buy-one-get-one-free offers. Mulch properly to get a good return on your investment and enjoy the esthetic and long-term benefits from such.