

Proper Mulching Techniques

As you look around town, you will find so 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, mainly as either organic or 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 and 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 “volcano mounds”. When mulch is piled high against the trunk of a young tree, the tree struggles to breathe properly through its roots, it may create habitats for rodents that chew and damage bark. It also promotes root diseases. While there is much to gain from mulching, follow these application methods to ensure the proper health of your landscape plants.



Do NOT do this!

- Make certain there is proper soil drainage
- Generally, all mulches are effective in promoting water conservation, moderating soil temperature, and controlling both weeds and some diseases. Contrary to popular belief, none will have any effect on acidifying soils around plants such as azaleas.
- For well drained sites, apply only 2-4 inch 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 beyond
- 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
- Avoid using fine, non-composted wood chips so that available soil nitrogen is not used up in the decomposition process of the wood chips