

## **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, controlling soil temperature, 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 doesn't need to be replenished often. However, this type of mulch does not improve soil structure, provide advantageous 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". When mulch is piled high against the trunk of a young tree, it may create a place for disease to grow, a habitat for rodents that chew the bark, and may even cause girdling of the tree. While there is much to gain from mulching, follow these few application methods to ensure the proper and proven, long-term health of your landscape plants.

- Make certain there is proper soil drainage.
- For well drained sites, apply only 2-4 inch layers; if soil is 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.