

Mulch Specifications



- Mulch shall consist of shredded wood chips and bark.
- Material shall be fairly uniform in size, quality and overall appearance.
- Mulch shall be free of material injurious to plant growth.
- Sources of mulch should be free of weeds and invasive plant parts or seeds.
- Sawdust, grass clippings, excessive green leaves, thorny plant parts, rocks, soil, dirt, food scraps, glass, plastic, metal, other garbage or debris mixed in the mulch is not acceptable.

Promote Healthy Plants

Mulch is an important integrated pest management (IPM) practice, nurturing healthy, pest resistant plants by:

- Reducing competition from weeds
- Keeping soil moist
- Adding organic matter that feeds beneficial soil organisms
- Preventing soil compaction and improving soil structure
- Insulating plant roots against temperature extremes
- Holding seeds, fertilizers and topsoil in place and reducing splashing of water and soil that might contain disease causing agents

In summer, 2 inches of mulch cuts water loss by 20% and lowers temperature in the top 4 inches of soil by 10 degrees. Young trees also establish themselves better and grow stronger roots under mulch than under bare ground.

Minimize Soil Erosion

Mulch is also a very important best management practice for controlling soil erosion. Wind and rain can carry away exposed soil particles, turning a valuable resource into a pollutant. In fact, soil sediment is the single greatest pollutant in our waterways. Covering the soil with a layer of mulch helps keep soil in place when exposed to rain and wind. It can also reduce storm water runoff velocity, minimizing the potential for creek channel erosion. Mulching is a critical practice during construction, when trees, shrubs and other plants that hold the soil in place with their roots have been removed, as well as over the long term, after construction has been completed.

Mulch Basics

1. Before applying mulch, remove weeds and water thoroughly. You'll get the best weed control when you weed first then spread the mulch. And it is often easier to wet the soil before applying fine textured mulches.
2. Replace grass with mulch under trees and around poles. Mulching under trees to the drip line minimizes competition for water and nutrients from grass and mimics the way trees grow in nature. It simplifies mowing and can reduce trimming operations and labor. In addition, mulching around poles, tree trunks and over surface roots prevents damage from mowers and weed eaters.
3. Keep mulch 6-12 inches away from the base of trees and shrubs. Tree trunks are not suited to wet conditions. Placing mulch so that you can see the root flare keeps the trunk dry and reduces the risk of damage from disease, insects, and rodents.
4. Choose the application rate that will give you the best results.
 - Apply a layer that settles to 2-4 inches deep. This is the best general application rate, especially for use in planting beds.
 - Fine Mulch: Apply no more than 2 inches. Thin layers of fine mulch (particle size of half inch or less) are less likely to impede air and water. Fine mulches decompose more quickly and need to be replenished more often than coarse textured woody mulches.
 - Coarse Mulch: Use 4-6 inches or more to control weeds in open spaces. Coarse mulch is best for weed control; it prevents annual weed seeds from germinating. Weeds that do sprout are easier to remove. For maximum weed control, replenish mulch once a year.
 - You can have too much of a good thing: Use lesser amounts on poorly drained soils.
 - Keep mulch on top of the soil to prevent tying up nitrogen. Woody material that is incorporated into the soil will temporarily inhibit the soil's ability to supply nitrogen to the plants. However, according to research, mulch only uses nitrogen at the soil surface, and not from the root zone. If you do not turn mulch into the soil, you'll prevent nitrogen drag.