

Using Wood Chips as Mulch

Solid Waste Management Fact Sheet No. 16

Wood chip mulch is made from the chipping of tree and landscape prunings. Rather than taking up landfill space, these once discarded products (including Christmas trees) are now providing a better growing environment for new plants in both landscapes and gardens.

Mulch is material placed on the soil surface for the purpose of protecting the soil and plant roots. Not only do organic mulches add a decorative natural appearance to the landscape, they also provide many landscape benefits.

Helps Retain Soil Moisture

Mulch helps soil retain moisture and reduces water evaporation caused by wind and hot sun. Under its insulating blanket, soil remains moist long after bare areas become dry and require irrigation.

Reduces Soil Temperature Extremes

An application of mulch helps avoid extreme temperature fluctuations. It acts as an insulating blanket and keeps soil cooler during hot periods and warmer in winter months.

Reduces Weed Growth

When the site has been properly prepared, mulching reduces weed growth (the headache of many gardeners). Occasional persistent weeds will need to be removed.

Saves Time in Landscape Maintenance

Place mulch under and between plants in tree and shrub beds, border plantings, hedges, rose beds, and fruit orchards. By replacing grass with mulch, mowing and watering time is cut dramatically.

Gives a Natural Look

A few fallen leaves in a planting bed with a wood chip mulch gives your landscape the natural beauty of a forest floor. When you choose to remove the leaves, they too can be recycled by composting and then used as a soil amendment.

Prevents Direct Contact with Soil

Mulch prevents vegetables (including squash, pumpkins, melons, cucumbers and unstaked tomatoes) from making soil contact, thus helps to reduce rot caused by soil microorganisms.

Create Paths

A thick layer of mulch can be used to create walkways throughout the yard. Mulch paths permit easy access to any part of the landscape, even after heavy rains. No longer is a wet plot off limits until soil has dried sufficiently. During dry periods, mulch also reduces dust from sandy soils.

Prevents Heavy Rain Damage

Mulching prevents soil erosion. It permits water to seep slowly beneath the protective covering.

Increases Survival of New Trees

Not only do mulches keep the soil cool and moist, they also keep the lawn mower and weed trimmer from damaging young bark and killing trees.

Site Preparation/Application

For best results, remove existing weeds and turfgrass prior to mulch application. Fertilize plants at 10 percent over label rates prior to applying the mulch directly on the soil. Keep the mulch 2 to 3 inches from the base of plants. Due to decomposition, you may need to topdress with a thin layer of new mulch each year.

- Apply to a depth of 3 to 5 inches.
- Apply mulch in a 3 to 6 foot diameter under newly planted trees.
- Apply mulch in a 1-foot band around large tree trunks to make mowing easier.
- Apply beyond the spread of shrubs to allow for growth without lawn mower interference.
- Cover the soil to the drip line under fruit trees for optimum growth.

It's an Alternative

Wood chip mulch is an alternative to:

- River Rock
- Cypress Mulch
- Volcanic Rock
- Bark Chips
- White Marble Rock
- Straw

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