

Mulching 101

What is mulch?

Mulch can be made from a variety of materials such as shredded wood or bark, wood chips, pine needles, or course compost. Mulch may also be dyed (often red or black) for aesthetic purposes.



Why mulch?

Mulch helps soil retain moisture, stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter, suppresses weeds, reduces solar damage, and adds nutrients to the soil as it decomposes.

When to mulch?

Mulching twice a year, in spring and fall, is recommended. In the spring it will help retain moisture during the hot summer months and in the fall it will help provide insulation for the roots during the cold winter months.

How to mulch?

Spread the mulch in a donut shape at least 50 cm away from the trunk, piling the mulch 5-15 cm high. A small tree will typically require one to two 5-gallon buckets, depending on its size. Do NOT make a volcano since it is important that the mulch not touch the trunk (root collar) of the tree, otherwise the bark will rot over time and become more susceptible to infection and disease.



Other Notes:

- Newly planted trees: before adding mulch, spread a layer of newspaper (4 pages thick) around the base tree (the root collar) to help suppress weeds and retain moisture. The newspaper will eventually decompose.
- Established trees: remove any weeds and grass from around the tree, since their short roots will absorb rain and nutrients faster than the tree making both less available to the tree.
- Older trees: also cover any exposed roots, where possible.
- Trees grouped together: instead of a donut around each tree, create a mulch “island” around the group.

Tips and Cautions:

- Most important is that mulch be free of weeds, fungus, mold, insect infestation, and chemical contaminants.
- Check with your community, town or city for mulch give-away events that are especially common in the spring (but always check that it is GOOD mulch before using!)

Examples of mulching best practice:

