

BEHOLD: THE POWER OF MULCH

The drought this area experienced in the summer of 1988 claimed the lives of many large, well-established landscape plants. In very few cases, did you see a dead plant that had been properly mulched. If mulching can mean the difference between life and death in a drought year, how much do we benefit from mulching in a normal year, without being aware of it?

Applying mulch around shrub plantings, trees, and flower beds has become very popular in the last couple decades. Most people prefer the look of mulch to bare soil or grass around their landscape plants, but did you know that horticulturists first began using bark mulches for many other reasons?

1. To prevent weed growth (Maintaining a 2"-3" thick layer of mulch reduces the need for hand weeding or herbicides.)
2. To conserve soil moisture (Studies indicate a reduction of moisture loss in summer by as much as 20% with a 2" layer of mulch.)
3. To reduce soil erosion
4. To reduce soil temperatures in the summer (Mulching lowers the temperature in the top 4" of soil by as much as 10%.)
5. To delay sudden drops in winter soil temperatures and prevent frost heaving of shallow rooted plants (Freezing soil temperatures are delayed as much as 2 days by the use of mulch.)
6. To improve soil aeration, water holding capacity, and fertility.
7. To keep fruits, vegetables and flowers cleaner by reducing soil splash.

You can get too much of a good thing. Mulch should not be applied thicker than three inches and never piled up against the trunks of your trees.

Composted bark is still the best product for achieving all the horticultural benefits of mulching.

Colored wood chips and various stone products have also become popular materials to use as a mulch, because they have a different look and may not need to be applied as often. However, these materials can have their shortcomings when used in certain situations. Share your landscaping needs with us, and we can offer advice as to which product will work best for you.