Benefits of Mulching
FACT SHEET

GREEN DROP Tree Care







What It Is:

Mulching is one of the most beneficial practices a homeowner can use for better tree health.

Mulches are materials placed over the soil surface to maintain moisture and improve soil conditions. Mulching is one of the most beneficial acts a homeowner can do for the health of a tree. However, improper mulching materials and practices may have little, or even negative, impact on the trees in your landscape

Benefits of Proper Mulching:

- Helps reduce soil moisture loss through evaporation
- Helps control weed germination and growth
- Insulates soil, protecting roots from extreme summer and winter temperatures
- Can improve soil biology, aeration, structure (aggregation of soil particles), and drainage over time
- Can improve soil fertility as certain mulch types decompose
- Inhibits certain plant diseases
- Reduces the likelihood of tree damage from “weed whackers” or the dreaded “lawn mower blight”
- Gives planting beds a uniform, well-cared-for look

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Benefits of Proper Mulching:

Trees growing in a natural forest environment have their roots anchored in a rich, well-aerated soil full of essential nutrients and soil microorganisms. The soil is blanketed by leaves, organic materials, and living organisms that replenish and recycle nutrients. This environment is optimal for root growth and mineral uptake.

Urban landscapes and new developments, however, are typically harsher environments with poor quality soils, reduced organic matter, and large fluctuations in soil temperature and moisture. Applying a 2 - 4 inch (5 - 10 cm) layer of organic mulch can mimic a more natural environment and improve plant health.

Types of Mulch:

Mulches are available in many forms. The two major types of mulch are inorganic and organic.

- Inorganic mulches include various types of stone, lava rock, pulverized rubber, geotextile fabrics, and other materials. Inorganic mulches do not decompose and do not need to be replenished often. On the other hand, they do not improve soil structure, add organic materials, or provide nutrients. For these reasons, most horticulturists andarborists prefer organic mulches.

- Organic mulches include wood chips, pine needles, hardwood and softwood bark, cocoa hulls, leaves, compost mixes, and a variety of other products usually derived from plants. Organic mulches decompose in the landscape at different rates depending on the material, climate, and soil microorganisms present. Those that decompose faster must be replenished more often. Because the decomposition process improves soil quality and fertility, many arborists and other landscape professionals consider that characteristic a positive one, despite the added maintenance.






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How Much Mulch?

As beneficial as mulch is, too much can be harmful. The generally recommended mulching depth is 2 - 4 inches (5 - 10 cm).

Unfortunately, many landscapes are falling victim to a plague of overmulching. “Mulch volcanoes” are excessive piles of mulch materials applied around the base of trees.

While organic mulches must be replenished over time, buildup can occur if reapplication outpaces decomposition or if new material is added simply to refresh color. Deep mulch can be effective in suppressing weeds and reducing main□tenance, but it often causes additional problems.

Improper Mulching Problems:

On wet soils, deep mulch can lead to excess moisture in the root zone, which can stress the plant and cause root rot.

- Piling mulch against the trunk or stems of plants can stress stem tissues and may lead to the development of insect and diseaseproblems or stem girdling roots.

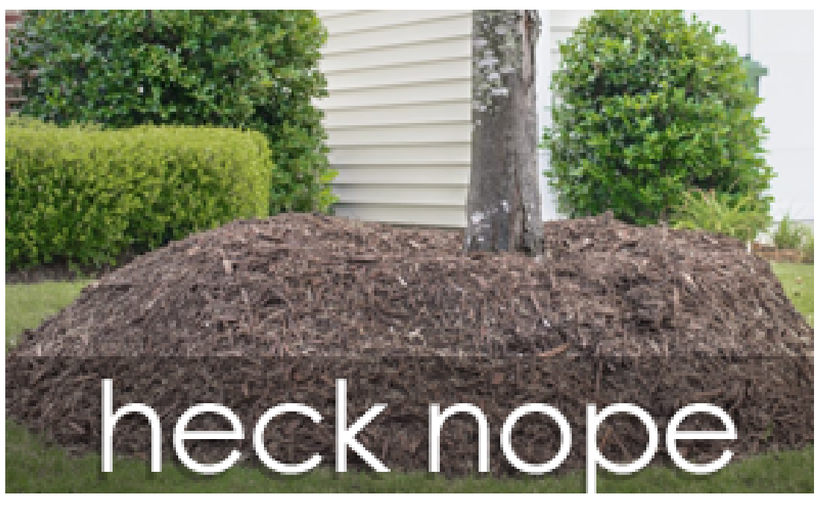
- Some mulches, especially those containing fresh grass clippings, can affect soil pH and may eventually lead to nutrient deficiencies or toxic buildups.

- Mulch piled high against the trunks of young trees may create habitats for rodents that chew the bark and can girdle the trees.

- Thick blankets of fine mulch can become matted and may reduce the penetration of water and air.

- Anaerobic “sour” mulch may give off pungent odors, and the alcohols and organic acids that build up may be toxic to young plants.







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