

MULCHING LANDSCAPE PLANTS

Mulch is any material placed on soil to cover and protect it. The use of mulches in landscapes is very beneficial and they should be used in all plantings.

Benefits of Mulching

- **Conserve soil moisture** by reducing moisture lost through evaporation caused by the sun or wind.
- **Maintain more consistent soil temperatures.** Keep the soil warmer during cool weather, and cooler during warm weather.
- **Minimize soil erosion and compaction**
- **Weed control** by acting as a physical barrier and blocking out light needed for weed germination and growth. The amount of weed control depends on weeds present, mulch type used, and growing conditions. Addition of a pre-emergence herbicide such as *Dacthal* or *Preen* will increase the weed control effectiveness of any mulch.
- **Gives a finished professional look** to the landscape.

Using a Mulch

Types

Organic mulches include shredded hardwood bark, cypress mulch, cocoa hulls, chunk Western bark or pine needles.

Inorganic mulches include gravel and landscape fabrics. Black plastic is possible to use as mulch, but is not recommended because water cannot penetrate it creating a watering a problem. It also can cause the soil to heat up too much in the summer. Landscape fabrics are permeable and provide good annual weed control. They should not be used with some groundcovers however because they prevent the spreading plants from rooting. Combining the landscape fabric with gravel or organic mulch, allows you to use less of the mulch and still retain your benefits.

How much? Organic mulch should be applied to a depth of **two to four inches**. Do **not** mulch deeper than four inches. This could result in lack of oxygen to the root zone. Organic mulches decay, thus you need to add more periodically. Measure the mulch depth each year to see if more is needed. Adding one to two inches every two to three years should be sufficient. Do not mound mulch onto trees and shrubs. This can encourage disease and decay.

For recommendations of mulches for your plantings, see one of our Green View associates or Illinois Certified Nurserypersons.