

# Mulching Your Landscape

Mulch is a layer of material spread on the surface of the soil underneath plants. It may be organic or inorganic. When applied correctly, mulch has the following beneficial effects:

- \* Maintains moisture and prevents loss of water
- \* Reduces the growth of weeds
- \* Keeps the soil cooler in summer and warmer in winter
- \* Prevents soil splashing, keeping soil-borne diseases from splashing onto plants
- \* Improves the soil - as it decays, it becomes topsoil and adds nutrients to the soil
- \* Prevents crusting of the soil surface, improving absorption of water
- \* Helps prevent soil compaction
- \* Adds beauty to the landscape
- \* Mulched plants have more roots than plants that are not mulched
- \* Reduces landscape maintenance by eliminating awkward areas to mow
- \* Prevents or slows erosion of soil

Organic mulches are made of natural substances, such as bark, wood chips, leaves, grass clippings or pine needles. Inorganic mulches include gravel, pebbles, and landscape fabrics.

The best time to mulch new plantings is right after you plant them. How often you replace mulch depends on the mulching material. Mulch should be applied about 2 to 3 inches thick and kept at least 3 to 6 inches away from the trunks of trees and shrubs. Excessive amounts of mulch can suffocate plants and create a crust that water cannot penetrate. Each year, when applying new mulch, the old mulch should be worked into the soil.

The type of mulch selected depends on your use. Shredded organic mulches are of benefit to the gardener who wants to improve the soil while keeping weeds at bay. Bark nuggets may take years to break down, but are esthetically pleasing and can also be used for paths. They should be used on a flat surface as they will wash away in heavy rains.

Inorganic mulches, such as stones and gravel, serve the same purpose as other mulches, but are used where a durable material is required. Disadvantages include poor weed control and the inability to add organic material to the soil once it is placed. Light colored mulches can increase the soil temperature during the summer.

To calculate the amount of mulch you need, determine how many cubic feet are required. (There are 27 cubic feet in a cubic yard. One cubic yard will cover a 324 square foot area with one inch of mulch.) First calculate the surface area and the desired depth of coverage. Find the square footage (width x length). Multiply your square footage by the depth desired (in inches) and divide by 324 square feet. This will tell you how many cubic yards you will need.

Johnson's carries a variety of organic and inorganic mulches for your use.

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