



Mulching

What is mulching?

Mulch is a protective layer of material that is spread on top of the soil. Mulches can either be organic (such as grass clippings, straw, or bark chips) or inorganic (like stones, brick chips, or plastic).

Benefits:

- Prevents weed growth
- Maintains soil temperature
- Prevents soil erosion
- Conserves moisture
- Reduces soil compaction
- Keeps feet clean
- Provides a "finished" look



Organic mulches improve the condition of the soil. As these mulches slowly decompose, they provide organic matter that helps to keep the soil loose. This improves root growth, increases the infiltration of water, and also improves the water-holding capacity of the soil. Organic matter is a source of plant nutrients and provides an ideal environment for earthworms and other beneficial soil organisms. Since inorganic mulches lack the soil improving properties of organic mulches, this tip sheet is limited to organic mulches.

Contact the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District for more information:

1717 Pleasant St.
Noblesville, IN 46060
317.773.2181
www.hamiltonswcd.org



Mulching enriches and protects soil, helping provide a better growing environment.

Mulch Materials:

- Bark Chips
- Wood Chips
- Leaves
- Grass Clippings
- Hay or Straw
- Compost
- Ground Corn Cobs

How to apply mulch:

To apply mulch, begin by asking yourself these questions:

- What do I hope to achieve by mulching? Weed control, moisture retention, beautification, soil improvement? This will determine which type of mulch you want to use.
- How large is the area to be mulched? How much mulch will I need to cover the area? An area 10 feet X 10 feet X 3 inches deep = 1 cubic yard.
- Determine and purchase the mulch material you need.
- Spread the mulch over the desired area, being careful not to cover or injure plants. Be sure to apply mulch in the correct depth.
- Watch for decomposition of mulch and replace it as needed by laying new material over the old.

When to apply mulch:

In your garden or flower bed, it is best to apply mulches after the soil has warmed up in the spring. Cool, wet soils tend to slow seed germination and increase the decay of seeds and seedlings. If you are adding additional layers of mulch to existing perennial beds, wait until the soil has warmed completely. Mulches that are used to help moderate winter temperatures can be applied late in the fall after the ground has frozen but before the coldest temperatures arrive. Applying mulches before the ground has frozen may attract rodents looking for a warm over-wintering site. Delayed applications of mulch should prevent this problem.

Mulches for protecting plants over the winter should be loose material such as straw, hay, or pine boughs that will help insulate the plants without compacting under the weight of snow and ice. One of the benefits of winter applications of mulch is the reduction in the freezing/thawing cycles of the soil that occur in late winter and early spring which cause many small or shallow rooted plants to heave out of the soil.



Mulch

Type	Depth	Notes
Bark Mulch	2 to 4 inches	Easy to spread. Keep mulch an inch or two away from tree trunks.
Wood Chips	2 to 4 inches	Similar to Bark Mulch
Leaves	3 to 4 inches	Best to chop and compost before spreading
Grass Clippings	2 to 3 inches	Add additional layers as clippings decompose. Do not use clippings from lawns treated with herbicides.