

Mulch

Think of mulch as sun block for plant roots. Just a few inches of mulch can substantially retain soil moisture, slow evaporation, and protect roots from overheating, control erosion and add a finished look to the garden.

Hate weeding? Start mulching! Mulch can reduce or eliminate weeds that compete with plants for moisture, nutrients, and sunlight. Mulch can be organic or inorganic material.

Organic mulch

These are wood-based, such as bark, and are the best choice because they retain moisture add nutrients and improve soil texture as they decompose. However, they will have to be replaced periodically as the mulch decomposes.

Inorganic mulch

These are stone-based. This mulch rarely needs to be replaced, but it tends to retain and radiate heat.

General tips:

- Remove weeds before spreading mulch
- Keep mulches about six inches away from the crowns and trunks of woody plants
- Reapply mulch as needed to maintain a 2 to 4 inch depth

Mulch myths

Myth No. 1: Mulch provides a permanent barrier to weeds. While mulch reduces the number of weeds, some pesky nuisances may still manage to grow through the mulch, or on top of it. Weeds will appear in new landscapes for the first year or two, even with mulch, because of the abundance of weed seeds in the soil.

Myth No. 2: Mulch placed against your house will attract termites. In reality, it's moisture, not mulch, which attracts termites. So any landscaping, including shrubs, can lure the unwanted critters.

Myth No. 3: There's no wrong way to mulch. When mulching, keep the bark or rock about six inches away from stems. Mulch creates a humid environment that is perfect for the establishment of various fungi that can injure or kill the plants. Also, avoid covering the crown of dormant perennials.