

## FROM THE CAMPUS

# Mulching made easy

The virtues of mulches are more than skin deep, according to Dr. Charles Dunham, extension horticulturist at the University of Delaware. Mulching can control weeds, conserve water and protect plants, as well as add beauty through a variety of available materials.

One benefit provided by mulches is water conservation. They cut evaporation losses by retaining moisture and capture water that would ordinarily run off in hard showers. Plants are protected from splashing mud and dirt that can be a problem to both vegetables and flowers.

There is a diversity of possible mulching materials, mostly organic but also inorganic, such as aluminum foil which is helpful in protecting plants from insect damage. Dunham claims that as long as water can penetrate and the mulch does not pack to exclude air from the soil it should work. Organic mulches break down at different rates and enrich the soil in the process, but if there is a high ratio of carbon to nitrogen a temporary nitrogen shortage can result, necessitating the addition of extra nitrogen. Sawdust and straw will do this.

For flower beds, house and patio, appearance and cost are probably important factors in choosing a mulch. There are some readily available that will enhance the looks of flowers and shrubs.

Bark and wood chips are ideal mulches especially for shrubs and ground covers. They are attractive and long lasting. Use coarser grades for trees and shrubs and finer, smaller sizes for flowers and ground covers. Four to six inches of mulch is needed for long lasting weed control.

Licorice root sold as Right Dress is one of the best mulches for flower beds.

Cocoa bean hulls are available in

some areas. These tend to pack so should not be used more than two inches deep. They also are sometimes toxic to azaleas. However, for many plants they are satisfactory and attractive.

Grass clippings are one of the cheapest and most available mulches. The problem with grass clippings is that used fresh they tend to rot and pack tightly, warns Dunham. This can be overcome by drying the grass first or stirring repeatedly until dry after they are in place. Grass clippings are probably best in the vegetable garden. Straw is also excellent in the garden.

Pine needles are an attractive mulch especially good for azaleas.

# Midges for weed control

University of Idaho scientists have released 25,000 insects in the hope they will destroy some plants.

The insects are skeleton weed midges and are roughly the size of fruit flies. The university has imported thousands of them from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Biological Weed Control Laboratory at Albany, Cal. to combat skeleton weed, a range pest that competes with forage grasses and crops.

"A few years ago there were just scattered skeleton weed plants found in the Payette River canyons around Banks and Garden Valley," said Dr. William Barr, professor of entomology at the university. "Since

then, that small population has mushroomed out all over the canyons between Banks and Lowman and even over into the Stanley Basin."

"The steep terrain in the canyons makes chemical control of skeleton weed dangerous and expensive," said Barr, "We brought in the midges because they have a definite potential for biological control and they're easy to rear. We don't really expect the insects to control the weed completely. But our plant scientists are working with a strain of rust disease that attacks skeleton weed specifically, and we hope that a combination of the insects and the rust will provide some measure of control."

## Get the Sarlo Edge

Backing up every Sarlo HIGH WHEEL mower is over 40 years of making only Sarlo power mowers!



No one knows High Wheel mowers better than Sarlo  
No one builds mowers better! No one backs mowers better with parts and service  
We have to — it's our only business it's the EDGE that helps you

Send for complete details

P. O. Box 1169, Phone 813 — 332-1955  
2315 Anderson Ave., Ft. Myers, Fla. 33902

SINCE 1935  
**Sarlo**

Circle 153 on free information card

- Stop transplant shock
- Transplant any time
- Prevent winter kill



Write for technical information.

**NURSERY SPECIALTY PRODUCTS**

410 Greenwich Ave., Greenwich, Conn. 06830 • (203) 661-5840

Circle 137 on free information card