

Mulch wisely to get full value

Buying and installing landscape mulch is not an insignificant expense. Use these tips to get full financial and plant nutritional value.

■ Using mulches in maintained landscapes reduces maintenance and improves plant health by retaining moisture and controlling weeds.

Mulches can also add beauty to landscapes. They're available in varying textures and colors.

But buying and installing mulch is not an insignificant expense. Here are some tips from the National Bark & Soil Producers Association (NBSPA) to get the full value of mulch in the landscapes you install or maintain:

Depth of application: 2 to 4 inches for most outdoor applications.

As a soil conditioner: Remove grass and weeds from the bed surface. Loosen the soil with a shovel or spade to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Cover the bed with 4 to 6 inches of aged, shredded mulch and till

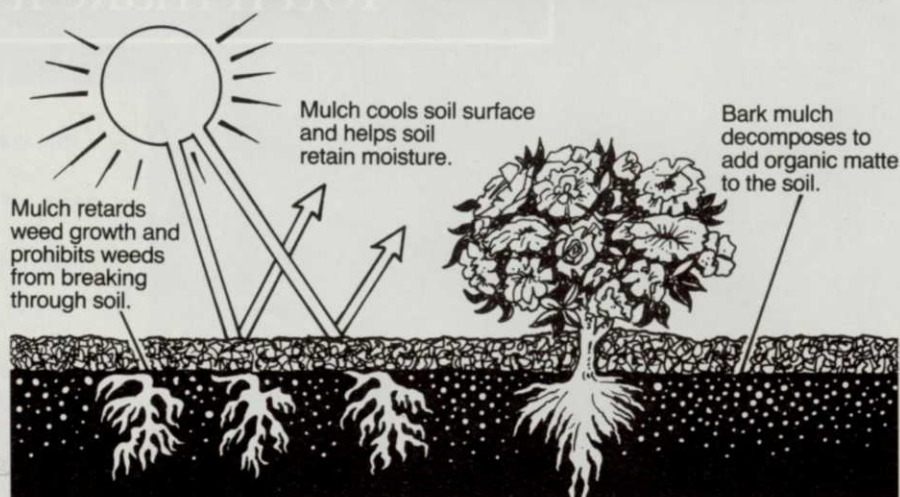


Diagram courtesy Hyponex Corporation

into the soil thoroughly.

Avoid excessive mulch build-up: Re-mulching beds over several years may raise the bed level too high for shrubs and perennials.

When bed depth rises above the base of shrubs, remove 2 to 3 inches of the underlying mulch and save it for other planting uses. The humus created by decomposing bark mulch is an excellent planting medium for pots and planters.

Nitrogen adjustment: Mulches may tie up nitrogen as they decompose.

Gently work a specially formulated fertilizer (like 16-9-12, 18-11-12, or 20-10-10) into the soil before mulching. Fertilizer application rates depend on the type of mulch used.

After mulching, follow recommended fertilizer programs to maintain good plant growth.

Look for low wood content: Bark decomposes slower than wood, maintains its color longer, and presents a uniform product appearance.

MULCH PRODUCT SELECTION GUIDE

	Pine nuggets	Pine mulch	Cypress grade A	Cypress grade B	Hardwood mulch	Western mulch
Characteristics						
Color (1)	red brown	light brown	gold brown	gold brown	dark br/blk	red brown
Longevity (2)	multiple	multiple	single	single	single	single
Moisture retention	low	high	high	high	high	high
particle size	1.25-3.5 in.	<1.5 in.	<3 in.	<3 in.	<3 in.	<1 in.
Wood content (3)	<15%	>15%	<15%	>15%	<15%	>15%
pH	neutral	slightly acid	neutral	neutral	slightly acid	slightly acid
Benefits						
Decoration	excellent	good	excellent	good	good	good
Erosion control	fair	excellent	excellent	good	excellent	excellent
Moisture control	fair	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent
Soil conditioning	fair	excellent	fair	fair	excellent	excellent
Weed control	good	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent
Applications						
Edging	good	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent
Drainage areas	fair	good	good	fair	good	good
Planting beds	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent
Planters	good	good	excellent	good	excellent	excellent
Play areas	fair	excellent	fair	excellent	excellent	excellent
Slopes & grades	good	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent	excellent

(1) Color may vary depending on regional tree species.

(2) Longevity is a rating of how long the product substantially maintains its original appearance and/or function. The rating for a single season or multiple season is an average based on a temperate climate and moderately intense sun.

(3) Wood content percentage is measured as a percentage of wood to total product weight.

Source: National Bark & Soil Producers Association