

A little mulch is all you need

Mulch is an organic or inorganic material that is spread on the soil around and under plants.

All mulches do three basic things: hold soil temperature steady, reduce moisture loss, and help reduce weed growth. But mulch does these things in different ways. Here's a look at what's available, courtesy of Ohio State University:

Peat moss

Generally available and ideal for mulching evergreens and other plants that grow best in acidic soil. It remains effective for one or two years, depending on the amount applied.

Hardwood bark mulch

Shredded hardwood, such as oak, has a nice dark color many people like. Like

other organic mulches, it starts decomposing and becomes organic to feed the roots of plants. Some fungi can form on the mulch, however, if it is left alone. A simple way to prevent this is to freshen your mulch about once a month.

Pine or cypress bark mulch

If you can't or don't want to spend time maintaining your mulch, but still want an organic choice, you might consider a slower decomposing mulch such as pine or cypress. These are not as good for the root-zone and don't have the dark color, however, they do work well as a cover-up, such as when flanking your sidewalk up to your front door.

Straw

Use straw for winter protection and as a summer mulch in fruit and vegetable plant-

ing. It may carry weed seeds, and it is flammable, so use straw away from areas where cigarettes may be thrown. A couple of other hints: don't use hay, and wait until vegetables have started to grow before you mulch to ensure the ground is warm enough for the plants.

Stones

Rocks and pebbles do have their place in mulching, usually in small amounts for color contrast or to highlight a certain area.

Two to three inches of mulch is all you need. Too much will interfere with the root system's oxygen supply. To prevent insect infestation, don't spread mulch right up to your house. Make sure there is about six to eight inches of bare dirt around the foundation. **LM**

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