

Types of Mulch

Municipal/ City Tree Trimmings

Using local mulch from municipal tree trimmings around plants has certain advantages over pine or hardwood bark. The contents of local mulch is much closer to the contents of rich compost. The local mulch blend actually feeds plants being mulched, but, on the down-side, the bark usually causes nutrients to be robbed from plants being mulched. When ever possible, look for mulch that has been “double-chipped”. It has a finer texture, because it has been put through a chipper twice.

Pine Bark

Ground bark is available mostly from pine trees in sizes ranging from 2-inch chunks to a fine grind. It provides an attractive long-lasting cove and is usually reddish brown in color.

Grass Clippings

These should be used only before grass seed has ripened, must be spread thin (2 inches or less) and allowed to dray. If applied too thick they will build up heat and foul odors and become slimy during decomposition.

Compost

This dark colored material is easily spread and has slight nutrient value. I may be highly satisfactory where available from commercial producers or homeowners.

Peat Moss

Fine texture and good color are characteristic of peat moss, but it h as a tendency to dry out and become imperious to water. It is costly to use in large quantities. Domestic peat moss may be so finely ground that it will blow away and is difficult to wet if it becomes dry. Water may run off rather than be absorbed by it.

Pine Needles

Needles are green when fresh then turn reddish brown to gray upon drying. They are long-lasting and supply nutrients as they decompose. Pine needles make attractive mulch, which is good for acid-loving plants such as azaleas, gardenia, and hydrangeas.

Sawdust

If fresh sawdust is incorporated into the soil, supplemental nitrogen should be added to prevent nutrient deficiencies.

Wood Shavings

Shavings last longer than sawdust and will not mat as badly. Decompose rapidly but blow away easily during strong winds. Wood chips mixed with shavings pull much nitrogen from sil. Nitrogen level must be increased.

Straw

Straw is coarser, more durable than most kinds of hay, and in most instances is not attractive in ornamental plantings unless chopped. Straw requires applications of nitrogen because of its non-decomposed nature.

Wood Chips

In landscape operations wood chips offer a useful method for disposing of waste twigs and branches. It is good mulch, coarser than sawdust and less likely to cause nitrogen deficiency. Wood chips are long-lasting, lie flat, and to not blow away easily in strong winds. Cypress chips to do not decompose within our lifetime and disrupt water movement in soil into they have been incorporated so **DO NOT TILL CYPRESS CHIPS INTO THE SOIL!!** Instead, rake or pull cypress mulch off beds before tilling and re-apply again after planting.

Lava or Crushed Rock (inorganic)

Crushed volcanic rock or stones are available in many colors or sizes and make a permanent cover. These materials are especially useful around plants subject to crown rot. Spread deeply,. Crushed rock can be walked o immediately after water. Remember that white rock radiates sunlight and create too much heat for most plants to survive. Black rocks absorb heat and can cause soil temperatures to be hotter than normal. A caution: Inorganic mulches of this type are exceedingly difficult to maintain and keep clean under pine o other very small-leaved evergreens.

Pea Gravel (inorganic)

Pea gravel is an attractive permanent mulch. It is usually applied 2 to 4 inches deep and can be reused indefinitely. Pea gravel in various sizes is especially good for soil surface around plants in containers.

Plastic Film (inorganic)

Plastic film is used to cover vegetable beds. In ornamentals it is often used under gravel or stone mulches. It is not practical under sharp stones unless used with a 1-inch layer or sand between soil and stones. Plastic is difficult to dispose of when used on large areas.

The sources of this GVST Gardening Guide are Malcolm Beck, founder of Garden-Ville, and Dr. Jerry Parsons, horticulture specialist with the Texas Cooperative Extension Service. More information can be found at this website: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/drought/mulches.html>