



Proper Mulching of Plant Material

WHY MULCH?

Applying mulch around trees, shrubs, perennials and other areas in your yard or garden is important for a number of reasons. Mulching your beds will drastically reduce the amount of time spent weeding, watering and fighting pests. Retaining moisture is very important for plant health and will cut down on time and money spent on watering. Mulch also improves the appearance of your garden, and keeps dirt from splashing up on your flowers and vegetables when it rains.

- Hardwood bark chip mulches are preferred. Cedar mulch is also fine. Keep in mind that even though the dye is natural, the dyed mulches may stain concrete and other hardscape materials. Bagged and bulk hardwood mulches are available for pick-up or delivery at Superior Garden Center.
- 3-4 inches of mulch is recommended around most trees, shrubs and perennial beds. Slightly less may be used in and around annuals.
- We recommend refreshing your mulch once a year; either in late fall or early spring when you are doing your bed clean-up is the perfect time to re-mulch. Remember to keep your mulch 3-4 inches deep.
- Every 3rd or 4th year if your existing mulch does not seem to be breaking down, it is good to rake out all of the old mulch and start with a new 3-4 inch layer of fresh mulch.
- Mulching around trees and shrubs requires care to prevent the mulch from coming into contact with the trunks. Once you have applied the mulch to the ground, pull the mulch away approximately 2 inches, creating a well around the base of the trunk. This will allow for airflow and prevent possible fungus and pest infestations around the base of your tree or shrub.
- Cotton Burr Compost makes excellent mulch as well, and provides nutrients to your plant material. We particularly recommend it around roses and in perennial beds. Cotton Burr Compost is available at Superior Garden Center.

WHY OUR MULCH?

Our mulch is made of 100% white oak which ensures that it is contaminant-free, non-toxic and biodegradable. Our vendors make sure that the mulch is free of metals, pallets, contaminants and pesticides. It is environmentally friendly as well, as it is a by-product of barrel making. Our naturally dyed mulch is fade resistant as well due to the quality of their color enhancers.

Does Mulch Attract Termites?

Homeowners often express concern that mulch applied to plants in the landscape may attract or harbor termites, which may then infest their homes. Duryea and others have documented that subterranean termites are capable of consuming certain types of mulch, including pine bark, pine straw, ground yard waste and cypress mulch. Also, the warm, moist conditions found under mulch tend to be favorable for termite exploration, tunneling and feeding. However, in a recent study (Long, et. al.) at University of Maryland, mulch-fed termites survived poorly compared to those consuming white birch wood (a termite delicacy). In the field, sustained termite activity was actually higher under pea gravel mulch than under pine bark, eucalyptus, and hardwood bark mulch. Based on their results, the authors recommend that thick layers of mulch (including rock) be kept 18 inches from structures. Thinner layers can be placed near, but not touching building foundations.

An interesting finding in Duryea's study was that, while the heartwood (the dark-colored core of the trunk) of cypress was consumed by termites much less than pine sapwood (termite candy), the sapwood of cypress was nearly as palatable to the termites as pine sapwood. Both heartwood and sapwood of *Melaleuca* (an invasive tree species in Florida) were consumed much less than pine wood (see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_FR075).

The general consensus among researchers seems to be that organic mulches create favorable termite habitat, and, while most commonly used mulches are low quality termite food sources, termites do consume them to some extent. Although there is no evidence that mulches "attract" termites, they do create favorable conditions for termites near the home. The most important practice for detecting a termite infestation in one's home is to leave at least a foot of concrete foundation exposed so that mud termite tunnels can be easily seen during inspection.

References:

Duryea, M.L. J.B. Huffman, R.J. English and E.G. McPherson. 1999. Will subterranean termites consume landscape mulches? *Jour. Arbor.* 25:143-150.

Long, C.E., B.L. Thorne, N.L. Breisch and L.W. Douglass. 2001. Effect of organic and inorganic landscape mulches on subterranean termite (*Isoptera: Rhinotermitidae*) foraging activity. *Physiological and Chemical Ecology.* 30:832-836.

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