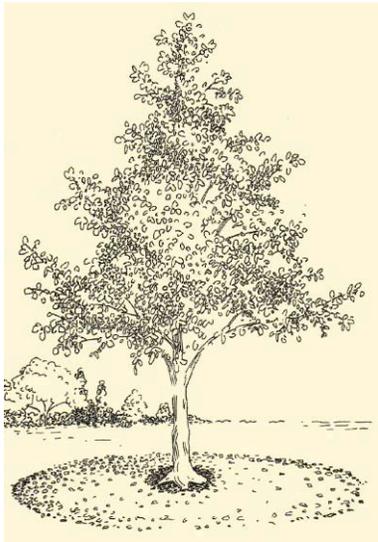


# SHADE TREE COMMITTEE



## MULCHING

### Benefits

The latest research shows that many summer and winter troubles can be avoided if mulch is used around the roots of young trees and shrubs. In the spring mulch stops the trees and shrubs from starting the new growth too early and prevents frost injury. In the summer it conserves moisture and brings relief from the heat. In driving rains it reduces runoff. We often do not have sufficient snow for proper winter insulation. Mulch delays freezing of the ground and makes moisture available to the roots longer. It moderates the temperature extremes, when there is alternate freezing and thawing so common in our zone. As a bonus mulch also controls weeds, before it slowly decomposes into humus and adds nutrients to the soil.

### Types of Mulch

Shredded hardwood bark and aged woodchips are the best mulches. Fresh grass clippings, woodchips straight from the chipper, peat moss, sawdust don't make good mulch. Brick, stone, marble, ground rubber tires, black plastic are not good, because they absorb the heat and reflect it back into the plants to the undersides of the leaves, not prepared for such additional stress.

### Depth & Distance from Trunk

Mulch, old and new, should be no more than **4 inches thick**; otherwise it will cut air supply to the roots. A thicker layer also

encourages roots to grow upwards instead of down where they belong. Keep mulch **4 inches away from the trunk or base of the shrub** to discourage fungi, rodents and insects. The mulch should lie flat (no volcanoes, please), and have a slight depression for water to sink in. It should be raked often to break up the crust that forms on top. Such crust sheds water instead of absorbing it, and hinders air circulation. Don't use plastic sheets under mulch!

### Keep Your Lawnmower and Trimmer Away

The trunks and bark of young trees and shrubs are often injured by mowers and weedwackers, usually at the base where it's hard to see. Such damage slows the tree growth and may kill the tree. The bark is as fragile as the human skin, and the wound becomes an entry point for insects and diseases. Trees are also more likely to produce suckers if injured at the base. If you use a lawn service, please, make sure the crew understands your concern and instruct it to stay away from tree trunks. Mulch puts some distance between mowing tools and your plants. Use it to protect your trees.

### Older Trees

Little circles of mulch on older trees do not benefit them and may even harm them. The point where the trunk flares into the main roots is best left alone. Those large roots function as the tree anchors and transporters of sap and have long stopped the manufacture of food. The feeder roots are farther out under the entire canopy of the tree and much beyond it. Such trees are best helped by ground covers or low growing shrubs. Both will work like mulch and also will trap most of the leaves from the tree as well as their own. In a few years, if you push such ground cover aside you will be surprised by a layer of perfect loam under your tree. In this way your trees own leaves will be recycled into a time released fertilizer.

### Mulch for Mulch's Sake?

One often sees mulched beds with very few or no plants at all. Such beds are mulched year after year—not as a temporary measure just to get plants established. If this appeals to you, consider the expense and this startling fact: in addition to genuine recycling of forest products, such as bark, entire cypress forests are ground into mulch to satisfy the demand. In large areas with few plants it might be better to introduce some permanent elements into your landscaping such as stonework or planking.

### Use in Borders

When the trees and shrubs grow in a tight border the best protection is offered by the fallen leaves. And this mulch is free! The leaves can be raked into such a border to a depth of 12 inches, which will allow for settling to 4" inches. Eventually they will produce a new layer of soil. Thanks to Mother Nature you will have lots of mulch every fall.