

Mulch with Less This Fall & Save More

You can create beautiful, healthy landscapes that control weeds, conserve water and reduce costs by using plant trimmings as mulch. Tree prunings, brush, grass clippings, and leaves that are chipped or shredded are an excellent source of mulch. In nature, these things fall to the ground, creating an organic layer that protects and builds the soil. This "local" mulch can offer the same advantage to the landscapes you maintain while saving you time and money, and using it recycles plant material into a valuable nutrient for your landscape. Using materials already present in your landscape areas also saves removal costs and the costs of bringing in "foreign" mulches. Consider the following types this fall and winter:

Mixed mulch...

Mixed mulch provides a broad range of nutrients and elements essential to building healthy soil. It can be any combination of the materials listed above, and can include chipped brush and other plant trimmings. You can produce it on-site with a chipper/shredder. It settles more quickly than pure bark or wood because the leafy material breaks down rapidly. This decomposition allows nutrients to easily be recycled back into the soil.

Compost...

Compost is plant and other organic matter that has gone through a controlled decomposition process. It provides many valuable nutrients thus improving soil structure. Used as a mulch, it may not control weeds very well because seeds can germinate and grow in the compost. It can however, as a mulch, be very effective for controlling erosion.

Leaves...

Leaves are plentiful, even in yards where trees are simply nearby rather than in the yard. They readily break down, creating natural mulch that contains valuable nutrients. Falling leaves is nature's system for returning nutrients and organic matter to the soil. However, leaves can be carried away by heavy rain or wind and dry leaves can be flammable under certain conditions. Their most efficient use may be as an aesthetic amendment in smaller planting areas.

Grass Clippings...

Grass Clippings are a good source of nutrients - particularly nitrogen - because they decompose rapidly. Leaving the clippings on the lawn is the best way to use them. They can also be used as mulch when they are too long to leave on the lawn, but are not considered to be attractive as other mulches and, if applied too thick, they can form a mat. They are an excellent amendment, though, when used in mixed mulches or compost.

Using mulch for more than its looks...

Mulch is a highly recommended and often used method of stabilizing soil to control runoff and erosion. It is very effective at reducing runoff velocity and, when combined with seeding or planting, mulch also:

- Provides essential nutrients and microbes
- Aids plant growth
- Holds seeds and fertilizers in place
- Prevents birds from eating seed
- Insulates plant roots

Creating mulch from plant debris and using mulch is also an important stormwater-friendly landscaping practice, helping control runoff and reducing the use of harmful fertilizers and, often, pesticides. Using mulch nurtures healthy soil by protecting soil structure, preventing erosion, and supporting the microbes that cycle nutrients and filter pollutants. Nurturing these essential and natural nutrients equates to needing fewer synthetic fertilizers, which means that fewer and fewer of these synthetics will end up in our streams and rivers. Covering the surface of all soil that is not protected by plant growth is critical for creating drought resistant soils and conserving water. Water quality is protected when soil erosion is prevented. Water quality is also protected when weeds are controlled through the use of mulch rather than herbicides. It is important, however to place mulch in areas that will protect it from being picked up and pulled into the storm drain with stormwater runoff.

...Remember that protecting our waters begins at home!

