

What is Mulch?

Mulch can be organic or inorganic. Northwest Washington garden soils and restoration sites benefit when organic mulch is used.

Organic mulch is chopped or ground organic matter. There are many types of mulch.

1. Hog fuel refers to any very coarse wood product chipped material. It might be processed in a tub grinder or it could be lumber mill chips, ends or other wastes used to generate a clean coarse wood chip.
2. Arborist chips are ground branches, leaves, and stems.
3. Mulch can also be composted leaves, nutshells and pine needles.
4. Beauty Bark is an organic mulch. It doesn't provide the same nutrient and mineral values of wood chip style mulches.

Beneficial Properties of Mulch (hog fuel & arborist chips):

- Enhances the establishment of trees and shrubs by creating an environment for mycorrhizal. Mycorrhizal fungus associate with plant roots, helping them to absorb nutrients from the soil.
- Increases biodiversity of beneficial soil animals and microbes
- Slowly releases nutrients over time as it decomposes
- Moderates soil temperatures by keeping plants cool in the summer and warm in the winter
- Reduces erosion and compaction
- Improves soil structure
- Provides mineral nutrients
- Suppresses pathogens and pests
- Reduces weeds. Light triggers annual weed seeds germination. Mulch can keep light from reaching weed seeds. Mulch can also smother perennial weeds.
- Weed control increases with mulch depth
- Mulch is superb worm feeder. Leaves and needles get eaten first and then the worms consume the woody debris. Worms also aerate the soil and provide pathways for water percolation by moving up and down through the mulch.
- Permeability increases with mulch coarseness

Applying Mulch

Apply mulch in the spring or fall before annual weeds get established

Remove perennial weeds in the spring

Remove all noxious weed materials from the site

4-6 inches thick for low weed areas

8-12 inches thick in restoration sites where non-native invasive weeds have been present.

Keep mulch away from trunks of trees and shrubs

Mulch will make it easier to pull any weeds that grow after mulching

Replace mulch as needed to maintain appropriate depth

Check out Linda Chalker-Scott's Washington State University website for great mulch information and other topics at: http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~linda%20chalker-scott/Horticultural%20Myths_files/index.html