

Mulch Importance

By: Melinda Sperl

I am often asked what color mulch we use in our business versus what type. I realize that the coloring of mulch is now a trend but this is also not necessarily good for your yard. As a landscaper and Horticulturalist, choosing a good hardwood mulch for my customer is just as important as choosing the right plants. Just because it is chipped-wood does not mean it is good mulch.

The most important part of quality mulch is whether it is composted properly. Why this is important is because when wood starts to decay or compost it will get very hot. Should you put non-composted mulch around your plants and in a thick layer, in our summer heat you just bake your plants.

Also, we want to make sure the quality mulch purchased is relatively free of weeds. When going through the composting process most weeds and weed seeds will be destroyed in the intense heat of the composting process. They can get so hot in the summer that water may need to be applied to prevent fire.

Mulch has many uses horticulturally in your landscape, as it is essential in weed control. It covers the weed seeds that need sunlight to germinate. A good hardwood mulch will break down into microscopic organisms that will fertilize the soil and increase the aerobic activity in the soil.

Mulch that has been colorized or burned such as black or red mulch often has other material chipped in it like particle board, plywood and building materials that do not break down properly to provide the nutrients needed for the soil and plants.

When purchasing mulch by the bag, careful choice should be made as even if the bag says hardwood mulch but the chips are large they can easily be blown or raked away by lawn crews who end up removing all the mulch while cleaning the flowerbeds. Even though pine bark mulch looks nice, be aware that this material is light and can very easily float off flowerbeds in heavy rains or with lawn crew blowers.

Weed seeds come from above and only germinate with sunlight. However Nutgrass will grow through anything, even weed fabric, and must be dug up or treated with a specific chemical. Please avoid those weed fabrics as they may not let your plants breathe.

Just like with any product you buy, doing your homework can save you time and money.

Happy Gardening!

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