

Is your water bill sky high? Do you want to conserve water, improve your landscape and save money at the same time? Use mulch!

Why use mulch?

- 1) Cuts down on watering
- 2) Prevents erosion
- 3) Insulates plant roots
- 4) Improves soil quality
- 5) Reduces weeds and maintenance
- 6) Improves appearance

Available mulches:

Shredded leaves: An excellent soil builder and quick to decay. Often weed-free with no additional cost. It adds texture and beneficial nutrients to soil while reducing landfill waste.

Grass clippings: An excellent -- and free -- soil builder. Breaks down quickly, but keep the layers thin. If your lawn is weedy, grass clippings will be a source of weed seeds.

Seed hulls (cocoa, rice): Easy to spread, often weed-free, but slow to decay and susceptible to erosion.

Pine needles: Weed-free and slow to break down. Good for use around trees and shrubs. Adds texture to soil and reduces soil pH. This is especially beneficial in new landscape developments with high pH soils.

Bark nuggets: Very slow to decay, weed-free, and good for use on paths and around trees and shrubs.

Shredded bark: Very slow to decay, weed-free, and good for use on paths and around trees and shrubs.

Wood chips: Very slow to decay, weed-free, and good for use on paths and around trees and shrubs.

Cypress mulch: Although widely available, may not a good environmental choice. Cypress are slow-growing native wetland trees that are often taken as whole, mature trees and chipped into mulch to help meet market demand. The enormous amounts of cypress mulch produced each year threaten the survival of this native Florida tree important for flood control, wildlife habitat and water purity.

Melaleuca: Provides additional benefits as an environmentally friendly product. Melaleuca is a tree native to Australia which was introduced to South Florida in the 1920's as a way to dry up the Everglades. Because of its quick proliferation, it destroys native vegetation. By purchasing Melaleuca mulch instead of cypress, you are helping to revive natural areas, restore the cypress population and heal Florida wetlands.

Pebble or Stone: Does not decay, nor requires frequent replacement. Is weed-free but often contributes to compaction of soil around roots of trees and shrubs. Does not hold moisture but reflects and radiates heat, which may be a problem for tender ornamentals or flowering woody plants.

Rubber: Allows water drainage and not attractive to insects. It is an excellent groundcover for parks and children's playgrounds. It does not need replacement and has a large selection of color choices.

How to mulch

For best results, spread 2 to 4 inches of mulch on plant beds. Keep the mulch several inches away from the plant stems to protect the stems from rotting. Gradually increase the thickness of the mulch layer going out from the plant. Add new mulch as needed, and stir the old mulch to promote air and moisture circulation to avoid matting and compaction of soil. Never use contaminated mulch.

