

Mulches and their characteristics

Mulch	Advantages	Disadvantages	Reapplication Frequency
Organic			
Peat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coarse textured • Increases water-holding capacity of most soils • Over time, could increase soil acidity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Difficult to re-moisten after it has dried • Repels water 	1 year
Wood Chips/ Shredded Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decompose slowly • Improve the soil • Long lasting and attractive • Relatively inexpensive • Easily applied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injury to plants may occur if applied too heavily • Wood chips may not cling well on steep slopes • Do not use near building foundations 	1-2 years, depending on size and type of wood
Straw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive • Readily available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coarse appearance • May contain weed seeds and some diseases 	Needs frequent applications
Lawn Clippings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily available • Usually free • Decompose slowly • Improve the soil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May mat down and interfere with water and air movement if applied too thickly • May contain weed seeds • May contain herbicides 	1 season
Leaves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily available • Usually free • Decompose slowly • Improve the soil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May mat down and interfere with water and air movement if applied too thickly • Should be shredded and partially decomposed before using (prevents matting and soil nitrogen binding) 	1 season
Pine Needles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragrant • Decompose slowly • Improve the soil • Over time, will increase soil acidity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always available • May mat down if applied too thickly 	1-2 years
Coca Bean Hulls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive and fragrant • Good soil conditioner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to float away during heavy rains • Expensive • Will decompose by mildewing 	1 season

Inorganic

Plastic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completely inhibits weed growth until it tears• Helps garden beds look neat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cracks easily from low temperatures or ultra violet instability, allowing weed growth• Expensive• Allows no water or air to enter or leave soil, stressing roots under mulched plants• Needs a supplemental irrigation source	Variable
Lava or Crushed Rock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes used to give a formal look	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expensive• Lava is very lightweight--tends to blow, roll or wash away• Allows weed growth• More ornamental than practical	Indefinite
Newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevents weed germination• Effective between vegetable rows• Readily available• Sterile	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can blow away if not weighted down• Unsightly in landscape setting	1 season
Landscape Fabric	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows water and air to permeate• Durable• Suppresses most weeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weeds may germinate on top of fabric• Cover with light top mulch to prevent fabric deterioration (landscape fabrics that are ultra violet stabilized do not need to be covered)• May shed mulch cover on steep slopes	Indefinite