



300 Park Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046-3332

Make the Most of Your Mulch!

HEALTHY OR HAZARDOUS?



Leaf or wood mulch can be healthy or hazardous for your trees. It all depends on how you apply it.

For tips on healthy mulching, refer to the reverse side.



Distributed by the Neighborhood Tree Program, a partnership between citizens and government initiated by the Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society. The program is operated under the guidance of the City Manager and the Falls Church Department of Development Services. Call 703-248-5183 for more information.



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Development Services Dept.
Urban Forestry Branch
300 Park Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046
703-248-5183

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Tips for Using Mulch Around Trees

Properly placed mulch protects your trees by:

- Retaining moisture
- Controlling weeds
- Reducing soil erosion and compaction
- Protecting tree trunks and roots from weed whackers and lawn mowers
- Providing nutrients essential for growth.

Mulch can also give planting beds a uniform, well cared for look.

NOTE: Do not grow grass beneath trees, especially young trees, as grass competes with the trees for limited water and nutrients and can restrict tree growth.

AVOID the following types of mulches:

Artificially dyed mulch and black plastic should never be used. Both contain dye that can leach out and end up in our groundwater and eventually the Chesapeake Bay.

Geotextile fabrics can lead to higher temperatures and also make weeds more difficult to manage (i.e., the top part of the weed is removed, but the remaining roots allow the weed to grow back).

Freshly cut grass used as mulch may “burn” the tree’s roots and may interfere with the tree’s ability to absorb certain nutrients.

Apply mulch:

- As wide as the canopy
- In a thin layer (1-4”)
- With space between mulch and trunk

The Basics of Proper Mulching

1. *Spread mulch under the tree’s canopy, as wide as the spread of the branches.* The root system of the tree is at least as wide as the canopy – and can be up to five times as wide! Mulch can best protect roots when it covers the entire area.
2. *Apply the mulch in a layer that is 2” to 4” high.* Avoid the “volcano” mulch technique, in which mulch is piled high against the trunk of the tree. A layer any higher than 4” may block the transfer of oxygen and water to the tree’s surface roots.
3. *NEVER pile mulch against the trunk of the tree.* Once the mulch is spread, pull it away from the trunk with your fingers, leaving a space of 4” or more between the trunk and the mulch. Mulch placed directly against the bark can cause the tree trunk to decay and die. Rotting bark creates a habitat for tree-damaging rodents, insects, and diseases.
4. *Keep the mulched area free of weeds, and apply more mulch annually, if necessary.*



For further details, contact the Falls Church City Arborist at 703-248-5183.