

FACT SHEET: For the Love of Mulch and Mulching

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I LOVE TO MULCH. It's relaxing; I'm outdoors and can see immediate results of my labor! This is a great time to add mulch to your landscape beds now that the weather is cooling off.

Mulch is very beneficial. It retains moisture in the soil, suppresses weeds, adds nutrients to the soil as it decomposes, moderates soil temperature, reduces runoff and erosion from your yard and enhances the beauty of your landscape.

Organic mulches include, pine bark (use the medium or small size as the large size tends to float away in a heavy rain), pine straw, Eucalyptus, Melaleuca has high termite resistance, oak leaves (great for the backyard landscape beds-not too pretty in the front), and municipal yard waste available at 3 county recycling facilities. All of these mulches are renewable resources.

What about termites? UF research indicates termites may be present more frequently in mulched versus non-mulched areas; however, certain practices will help deter these critters: leave space between plants and exterior walls; pull mulch 1 foot away from walls, apply mulch 1 inch thick near buildings to reduce moisture near foundations; and apply no more than 1 inch of water per irrigation.

Wood and bark mulches should be 2-3 inches deep after settling. Mulch newly-set plants after they are planted and watered. Re-apply mulch around established plants as needed to maintain the 3 inch depth. Pull mulch 2 inches away from trunks/stems to prevent rotting.

Rob Northrop, Extension Forester, advises mulch is a good way to keep lawn mowers away from trees. It helps control grass which competes with root systems of young trees and extends the time it takes to establish the tree. Recent UF research suggests mulch should not be placed over the root ball of young trees.

Enjoy the beautiful weather and spruce up your landscape beds at the same time! Happy mulching! For horticultural assistance, contact the Hillsborough County Extension Office, 744-5519, or visit us at 5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584. Master Gardeners are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. We can help!