USING MULCH IN THE LANDSCAPE

The soil environment beneath the mulch is favorable for promoting earthworms, which in turn are valuable for aerating the soil. Organic matter is gradually added to the soil as the mulch decomposes improving the tilth of the soil. Mulch will have little effect on soil pH. Sawdust does not deplete nitrogen when used as mulch; however, avoid incorporating fresh sawdust into the soil.

For weed control, spread shredded leaf mulch, wood and bark mulches 2 - 3 inches thick or 3 – 5 inches of pine straw. At the end of the season, in annual gardens, work the mulch into the soil to further improve its physical properties. For perennials, it may be beneficial to remove the mulch in the spring to allow the soil to warm up faster.

For water savings and cool roots, spread mulch out at least to the branch tips of the plant you want to protect. The feeder roots under and beyond the limbs are what need mulch and drought protection. Do not build “mulch volcanoes” around tree trunks. The mulch holds moisture against the trunk creating a favorable environment for fungi which can eat through the bark causing decline and possible death of the tree. Apply five inches of mulch, keeping it off the truck, and extending the mulch beyond the drip line 50%.

Excess mulch will prevent much needed oxygen from reaching the roots of plants and will encourage the roots to grow out of the native soil into the mulch layer where they can be injured by drought or cold temperatures.

Use caution before spreading pine chips under pine trees. These chips are strongly attractive to the black turpentine beetle and moderately attractive to the southern pine beetle. It is best to use pine chips under hardwood trees and shrubs. Use hardwood chips under pine trees.

Putting mulch against your home’s foundation can lead to termite infestation. The termites can crawl above the insecticide treated soil and reach the wood framing. Pull all mulches away from your foundation at least twelve inches.

Mulch is not permanent. All the organic mulches decompose wherever they touch the soil and weed seed will sprout in this layer. It is not necessary to remove old mulch, simply replenish it with a layer of new mulch to maintain proper depth. One cubic yard of bark or compost will cover 100 sq. ft. 3 inches deep. One bale of pine straw will cover 50 sq. ft. 4-1/2 inches deep.

Decomposition is done by fungi and bacteria. These fungi and bacteria are not harmful to landscape plants and no known health hazards are associated with them unless they are eaten. Fungi are found from April through October, usually following rainy weather. They do not need to be removed and will decompose.