



Mulch & More: A How-To Guide to a Healthy Yard



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

College of Agriculture
and Bioresources

AGBIO.USASK.CA



City of
Saskatoon

Mulch

Want a low maintenance flowerbed or vegetable garden? Then consider mulch!

When you mulch you have

- less weeding,
- less watering,
- less soil compaction,
- less winterkill, and
- healthier plants.

What is Mulch?

Mulch is a layer of material spread on the surface of your soil, beneath and around your plants. It can be thin (e.g. a sheet of cardboard on your vegetable gardens paths) or thick (e.g. leaves or wood chips in your flowerbeds). While mulching will cut maintenance drastically, it isn't magic. Weed seeds can still blow in, but they're far fewer and much easier to deal with.

Don't Garden Harder, Garden Smarter!

Plants will adapt to their local environment, so the more consistent the conditions in your garden are kept the more likely your plants will be able to manage their own health without your interference.

Mulching keeps water and soil temperature more consistent, helps reduce soil compaction and weed growth, attracts good insects (like ladybugs), and protects plants over the winter.

Ultimately, the right mulch will improve your soil, lead to healthier plants, and build a healthy garden ecosystem.





Organic Mulches

Not only do plant-based (organic) mulches lower your weed and water maintenance, they also build healthy soils as they break down.

Simply spread a four to five inch layer of the following mulches under and around your plants.

- herbicide free grass clippings
- fallen leaves
- compost
- post peelings or wood chips
- peat moss
- newsprint—shredded or layered
- shredded bark
- evergreen needles and cones*
- well rotted manure
- flax straw or shives

*Evergreen needles and cones will not harm the pH of your soil and can be used as mulch and in your compost. Suppressed plant growth under your evergreen trees is not due to the pH of the soil, it is because plants have little to no access to water or sun.





Inorganic Mulches

Inorganic mulches (that are not derived from plants) will still provide the same weed and water benefits as your organic (plant-based) choices, but don't tend to improve your soil or garden ecosystem.

Place the following in places with high traffic like playgrounds, foot paths and driveways.

- pea gravel
- crushed rock
- shredded tires

Garden Ecosystem

Organic mulches provide a home for beneficial insects, like ladybugs and spiders. These insects will reduce the number of pests you have in your garden.

Pine cones make a lovely mulch with plenty of habitat for ladybugs and spiders. Fallen leaves are also effective mulch for ladybugs.



How to Apply

- **Weed the area** to be mulched.
- **Water deeply before and after applying mulch** to ensure there is enough moisture in your soil for your plants to access. You only need to water when mulch is first applied. Rain water is ideal.
- **Apply your mulch evenly.** Don't mound it around tree trunks like a mountain. Spread mulch about four to five inches thick in your garden bed.
- **Enjoy your summer.** You will still need to weed and water occasionally but it's not likely to be very often, especially once your plants adapt to the new ecosystem you've created.



Mulching Tips

- Plastic sheeting, landscape fabric, untreated wood planks, and cardboard can be used as a temporary mulch between your garden rows.
- Landscape fabric does not work well for longterm weed control since weeds will still seed on top and become difficult to remove. The best use of landscape fabric is for landscaping—namely, to prevent erosion in raised beds. For weed control under rocks, try brown cardboard instead.

Mulch & More

Use mulch in combination with other healthy yard practices, such as backyard composting, rain water capture, and pesticide free gardening.

Gardening at the U of S

For gardening classes for the beginner through to certification, go to gardening.usask.ca. Take a class, join a free horticultural tour, or enrol in our Gardening 101 series to walk you through your first year.

City of Saskatoon

Having a healthy yard and garden benefits you and your community. For tips on water conservation, backyard composting, pesticide reduction, and more, visit saskatoon.ca/healthyyards.

Questions?

Get free, local gardening advice from the University of Saskatchewan's Gardenline at gardenline.usask.ca year round. During the growing season contact a horticulturist for personalized advice at gardenline@usask.ca.

Community gardening can be an excellent option for every type of gardener, particularly those with limited garden space. To join an existing community garden, or to start one yourself, visit: chep.org/en/programs/community-gardening.

Grow a Greener Saskatoon