

Mulch Matters

With warm weather approaching, many gardeners will be busy cleaning up and repairing their gardens and yards from the cold weather. Listed below are some helpful hints when using mulch....

- ◆ Try to use organic mulch or mulch that is composted prior to using so that weed seeds, insects and disease microorganisms are killed.

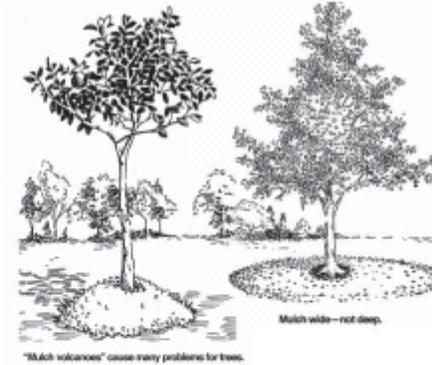
- ◆ Spread mulch under trees, shrubs, and throughout planting beds to a depth of no more than three to four inches for most medium-coarse-textured mulches.

- ◆ Pull mulch away from the base of the tree to create a donut-shaped hole. Placing mounds or cones of mulch (volcano mulching) against the tree trunk may look good but this practice can trap too much moisture near the base of a tree and create the ideal condition for pests and disease.

- ◆ Spread the mulched area around a tree to the drip line of the branches or at least a four to five foot diameter around the trunk. Larger mulched areas are more beneficial.

- ◆ Check the mulch level annually and replenish as necessary. Excessively deep mulch restricts free airflow to plants' surface-level roots.

Mulching is important because it provides a



layer of insulation that protects plant roots from temperature extremes, conserves soil moisture, improves soil's organic composition, prevents erosion, and reduces root competition. (Article printed in part from the Morton Arboretum - Healthy Mulch Use)

Mulch Fires

Shredded wood generates heat as it decays. While a rare occurrence, it can smolder and ignite by itself, even in a 4" - 6" layer. Don't put mulch in large piles. Rake and water it down from time to time, too.