

USING MULCH ON FORT HUACHUCA



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What is Mulch?

Mulches are organic or inorganic materials that can be used to cover the soil around the root zones of plants.

- **Organic mulches-** (bark or wood chips, leaves, grass clippings, compost, hay, straw) add nutrients and keep the soil cool. When applying mulch keep the material a couple of inches away from the base of the plant as moisture accumulation may cause rotting. Organic mulches can blow away with strong winds or float off in heavy rain. They will also break down over time and need to be replenished.
- **Inorganic mulches-** (gravel, decorative rocks, sand, decomposed granite) have a long lifetime but may need to have more material added over time and be leveled or raked once in a while. Also, inorganic mulches add no soil nutrients and may warm the soil.

Why use Mulch?

- Mulches prevent moisture loss from evaporation, therefore extending the time between waterings, sometimes for significant periods.
- By shading the soil, mulches inhibit weed growth. Weeds that do grow are easy to pull and the number of weeds that need to be pulled will decrease over time.
- Organic mulches help keep the plant and its roots cool.
- Gravel or rock mulches can prevent rainwater runoff.
- Mulches keep soil from splashing onto plant leaves, thereby reducing the potential for certain diseases.
- Matching the right mulch to the type of plant or crop can enhance plant growth.
- Mulches reduce maintenance and add a finishing touch to the landscape.

How do I use Mulch?

- A good rule of thumb is to apply mulch at least 2-3 inches deep around the root zone of trees, shrubs and flowerbeds. Remember to keep mulch 2-3 inches away from the base of the plants.
- Weed fabric may be used under mulch as an added measure to keep weeds down. Do not use black plastic because it does not allow the exchange of water and oxygen that plant roots require. Plastic also permits rainwater to run off the property – you want to retain it! If plastic is already installed, you can take a garden fork, screwdriver or similar pointed tool and punch holes in it, especially around the perimeter of plants. This is especially important at the drip line of trees to allow water to penetrate down to the feeder roots.

Be creative with mulches. Use different textures and colors to define areas. Try to use the appropriate mulch for different situations. Most native plants enjoy rock mulches and will thrive on the reflected heat. Organic mulches can be dug back into the soil periodically to improve soil structure and a new layer of mulch can be added.