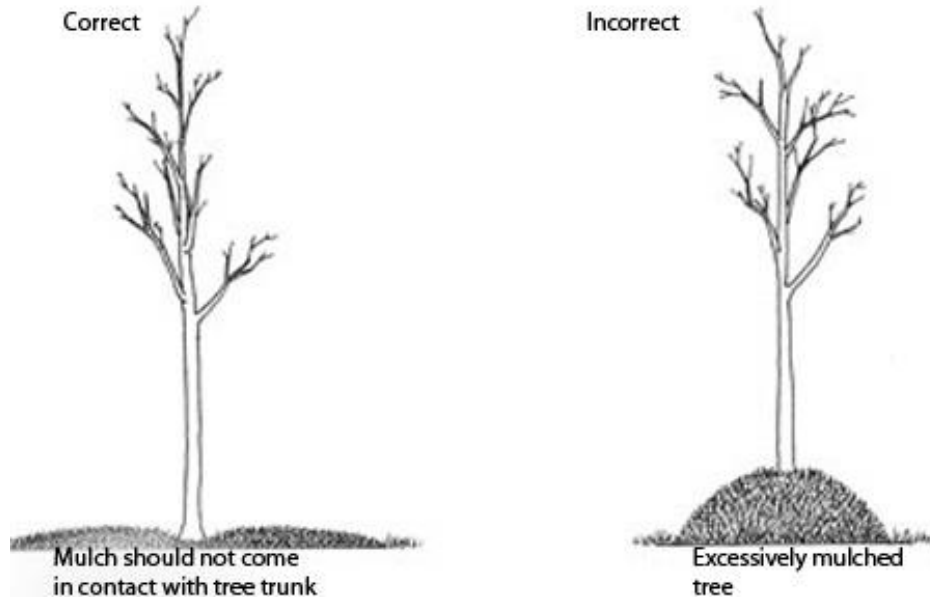


How to properly mulch your trees!

Walk along any sidewalk in our area, and you will see trees improperly mulch!

When mulching a tree – think of bagels and donuts. What do they have in common? A hole in the center. Exactly how your mulch should look – having a center hole circling the tree, keeping the mulch from contacting the trunk, and thereby avoiding ROT!



Correct mulching on left, incorrect mulching on right

Proper tree mulching (without grass) starts out about 3 to 6 inches from the trunk and continues out **3 feet in all directions! This should be about 2-3 inches deep maximum!**

Six feet would be even better for long-term establishment and increased growth.
Check the mulch depth annually and replenish as necessary.

Value of tree mulching

Creating a mulch ring around a newly planted or young tree less than 10 years old is the single best practice that can be done once the tree is planted. Tree mulching provides so many benefits, most importantly increased growth. Everyone wants a fast growing tree and proper mulching is the key. Research has proven that, over time, a mulch ring placed 3 to 6 feet around the tree can almost double the growth rate of the tree.

Mulching decreases competition from the grass. Grass robs water and nutrients from the tree's root development and delays its establishment. A properly placed mulch ring helps conserve moisture and cools the soil aiding in root growth. Lastly, the other main advantage to mulch is it keeps our lawn mowers and weed whips away from the tender trunks. It is amazing how many landscape trees have been compromised by having chunks of bark knocked off in our zest to whack back every single blade of grass.

How not to mulch a tree

Unfortunately you can look on just about every street corner and see examples of what not to do!

Tree mulching should NOT heap piles of mulch up against and around the trunk. Mulching is NOT developing a volcanic cone of wood mulch a foot or more high right up against the trunk. Placing piles of mulch up next to the trunk of any tree is NOT beneficial to the tree! It encourages ROT.

Mulch heaped against the trunk of the tree results in a shortened life expectancy, and frequently death. Mulch that touches the trunk retains moisture from rainfall and irrigation. Over time this moisture rots and decays the bark layer of the tree, which kills the underlying cambium layer (the living cells under the bark) where trees grow, eventually rotting the heartwood of the tree.



Deep piles of mulch, over 4 to 6 inches deep, also excludes oxygen from the soil. This results in roots developing up into the mulch layer, not down into the soil. These so called surface or mulch roots do little to support the tree in the long-term for robust growth.

How to mulch a tree

When it comes to mulching trees, think about donuts and bagels. What is in the center of these items? A hole! This hole in the center is where the tree trunk would be located.

Proper tree mulching starts out about 3 to 6 inches from the trunk and continues out in all directions at least 3 feet. Six feet would be even better for long-term establishment and increased growth.

The thickness of the mulch layer should be somewhere between 2 and 4 inches deep, or thick. It does not take piles to accomplish the benefits of mulch. A properly mulched tree should appear to have just a slightly raised ring around the tree.

Over time the mulch will blow up next to the trunk and breakdown.

This means that as part of normal maintenance the mulch ring should

be replenished yearly. Start by carefully pulling the mulch back from the trunk, and then add enough new mulch to the 4 inch depth.



Types of mulch

The best mulch for trees is organic wood chips. There are a number of different wood chip products which all accomplish the desired outcome of improved tree growth. Select which type of mulch fits your budget and desired appearance. Raked leaves are just as effective as the trendiest designer dyed mulch on the market. Wood mulches will not transmit insect and diseases to the tree. Any harm associated with wood chips comes from improper mulching practices. Keep in mind, mulch serves a function. Its secondary aesthetics is only important to one's personal taste. The tree really does not care.

Mulching young trees is more important to overall establishment and growth than fertilization or other practices. The removal of the sod and creating this zone of root development will help develop a healthy tree. Don't follow the bad examples we often see in our neighborhood. A tree is a long-term investment that takes years to grow. Proper mulching can ensure you are successful in growing trees on your property!