



Mulch – Like Icing on a Cake

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If you asked me what is the one thing you can do to keep your landscape looking good through the long hot summer, I

would not recommend using more water. But I would highly recommend keeping a layer of mulch under all of your plants. A mulch layer will reduce evaporation of water from the root zone making water available to the roots for a longer period of time. Adopting this practice means you will need to water less often and plants will grow better and suffer less stress during the summer heat.

Just because we have received enough rain to replenish most area lakes, we do not need to stop the landscape water conservation practices recommended during last summer's drought. The drought may be over, but as population growth and development continue, there is still not enough water to suddenly forget about ways to save it in the landscape. If you're like most homeowners, your water use jumps 30 to 60 percent during the hotter months depending on landscape size, plant selection, and irrigation efficiency. That's where mulch can help.

Mulch is a layer of organic matter covering the soil. Bark, wood chips, leaves, pine needles, and grass clippings are good mulch materials. Add a layer of mulch to shrub, groundcover, flower and garden areas, and around newly planted trees. In nature, mulch naturally forms as leaves and other debris fall on the ground. This organic layer protects the plant's roots and eventually breaks down into nutrients for the plants. Think of mulch as a blanket over the soil or,

aesthetically as icing on the cake. Like icing keeping cakes moist, mulch keeps moisture in the soil.

Mulching is one of the most important ways to maintain healthy landscapes and the benefits are numerous:

- Mulch increases water absorbing capacity by allowing the water to enter the soil more efficiently.

Bare clay soil forms a crusty surface which water has a hard time penetrating.

- Mulch increases water holding capacity by preventing evaporation of water from the root zone. This additional water holding capacity allows the roots to absorb water for a longer time which means less frequent irrigation.

- Mulch prevents soil splashing, which helps stop erosion and keep soil-borne diseases from splashing onto plants.

- Mulch also helps prevent weeds by placing existing weed seed too deep to germinate. Weed seed that blows into the garden and germinates is easier to pull from a thick mulch layer than from soil.

- Mulch moderates the soil temperature in the winter and summer.



Mulch will eventually decompose into nutrients for the plants. So add more mulch as you see the layer settle. Try to keep a 2 to 4 inch layer of mulch on the soil below shrubs, groundcovers, flowers and other garden areas. In the lawn, leave the grass clippings on the turf to act as mulch. The small grass clippings will break down and help fertilize the lawn. You can also add a fi inch layer of compost to the lawn to help with water absorption and nutrients.

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