



## Fact Sheet

# MULCH

A well mulched garden produces healthy soil structure and vigorous, disease resistant plants. Using organic mulch reduces weeds and watering requirements and also feeds your plants.

### Why mulch?

A garden without mulch is much more time consuming to maintain because the soil dries out quickly and therefore requires watering more frequently. When the soil surface is exposed, weeds easily take root and compete with your plants for nutrients, moisture and light. Bare soil becomes hard-baked on the surface which means watering and Feeding are difficult as the moisture cannot penetrate the top layer.



### How mulch works

Organic mulches such as manure, leaves and compost gradually break down into the soil and feed the plants at the same time. As your garden is watered, nutrients from the mulch seep down into the soil and keep plants growing at a steady rate.

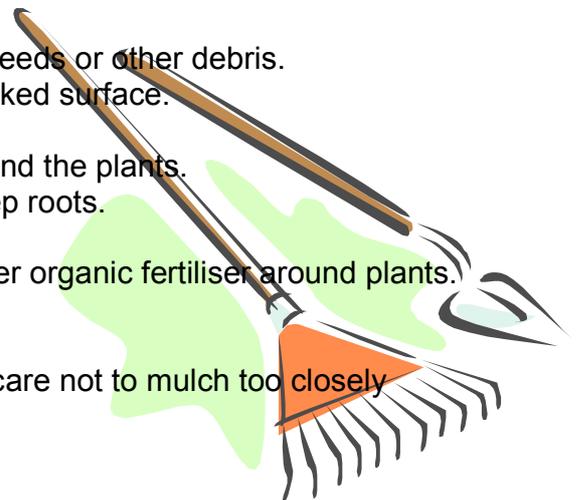
In native bushland the ground is covered with leaves and bark and animals droppings - creating a natural layer of mulch.

The mulch acts as a surface layer between the soil and the elements - especially the sun and wind which can cause so much damage. Soil that is deeply mulched with organic matter wont dry out rapidly, which reduces watering needs and takes up less of your valuable time.

Weeds are much easier to control in a well mulched garden because the mulch will hinder them taking root.

### How to mulch a bare garden bed:

1. Clear around the existing plants, removing any weeds or other debris. Turn the soil over lightly to break up the hard packed surface.
2. Water deeply to completely saturate the soil around the plants. Deep watering encourages plants to develop deep roots.
3. Sprinkle a few handfuls of blood and bone or other organic fertiliser around plants. This will get plants growing well.
4. Apply the mulch layer to a depth of 8 cm, taking care not to mulch too closely around stems and trunks of plants.



### Newspaper mulching to fight weeds

1. Clear weeds away from the base of plants, turning the soil over as you weed. Water using a gentle spray.
2. Cover the soil with 10 layers of newspaper that has been soaked in water- you can use a bin or wheelbarrow to do this. Make sure the edges of the newspaper are well overlapped; this will smother any weed seeds.
3. Cover the newspaper with a layer of straw, pinebark etc, to a depth of approx. 10 cm. Water well to settle paper and mulch.



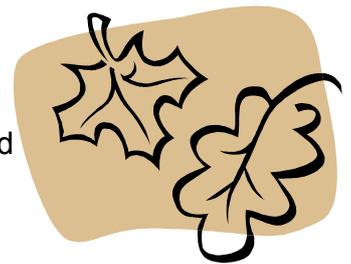
### TYPES OF MULCH

#### Coco Peat

Finely chopped, mid brown fibre that holds moisture very well; quite expensive if used over a large area.

#### Leaf mulch

Deciduous leaves used directly around plants; gives gardens a natural looking surface; leaves will rot down and feed plants; can become matted and stop water penetration.



#### Pine Bark

Various sizes of dark red-brown pine bark which vary from finely shredded to large chunks makes pinebark a very versatile mulch suited to a variety of gardens. Gives a neat and tidy finish.

#### Coarse pine bark chips

Should never be used on the vegie patch, only on the ornamental garden. They are placed on the surface and will rot down over a period of many years.



#### Pea straw

Hardly contains any nitrogen, but it rots down very quickly. It's great in the vegie garden. Put it under and around the plants and add sheep manure and blood and bone.

#### Fine pine bark chips

Have a beautiful smell. Spread them about 10cm thick on the surface but never dig them in. Add some blood and bone or any fertiliser over the top. This will filter down to the soil below, especially when it rains.

### Woodchips

Shredded and chopped timber in natural colours; can be produced in a large mulching machine and is a good way to re-use tree prunings; will not feed plants - use over manure mulch.

### Straw

Light coloured natural finish; darkens with age and weathering; does not provide nutrients to plants; can contain weed seeds; use over newspaper



### Mushroom compost

Dark brown shredded waste from mushroom production; high in nutrients; not good for acid loving plants; holds moisture well; gives garden a neat finish.

### Lucerne

Pale brown or green straw like material; rich in nutrients to feed plants; good snail and slug repellent; expensive if used in large quantities.

### Decorative Mulches

We have an extensive range of gravel mulches including :

- Crushed Limestone - cream colour 10mm & 20mm - can contain clay
- Deco Gravel - mixture of whites & greys
- Pink Deco Gravel - pink tonings of above
- Scoria - red stone
- White Pebbles - pure white 15mm & 20mm



**Blue metal** can be used as a mulch for alpine plants. Blue metal almost duplicates their natural conditions high up on mountains on scree slopes. Water filters down through the metal to the plant roots ensuring they don't rot off at ground level.

You can use **big pebbles, rocks or even boulders** as mulch - they look great and keep the ground underneath cool and moist, but be aware that weeds will still grow between rocks so you may need to spray with a non-residual herbicide such as Roundup.

Mulching is all about protecting the soil and also reducing the amount of work in the garden.

Stoneman's has a variety of bulk and bagged mulches available. For assistance in choosing the best mulch for your purpose, please speak to one of our friendly staff members.

## SEASONAL TIPS

### SPRING

#### **Weeding and mulching.**

Before new growth begins, remove all weeds and lightly cultivate the soil surface. Watering deeply will help prepare the soil before mulching.



### SUMMER

#### **Replenishing mulch.**

Mulch can become thin and depleted during hot weather. Mix some organic fertiliser with the mulch to keep plants growing well.

### AUTUMN

#### **Raking and storing**

Gather leaves, and either rake them directly onto garden beds, or pile them in a corner where they will gradually rot down to form leaf mulch.

### CAUTION

Do not take mulch right up to the trunks of plants as it increases ground-level humidity, which can cause fungal problems.

This applies to seedlings, which can collapse if mulch is against their stems and also to trees and shrubs which may develop collar rot if the mulch is piled up around the base.

#### **\*\* TIP**

Several types of mulch can be mixed together according to their availability. Grass clippings, shredded bark and well rotted manure can be combined to create a healthy, balanced mulch layer.



#### **\*\* TIP**

Plants in outdoor pots or tubs will also benefit from mulching. Decorative gravels can add another dimension to your potted garden and come in a variety of colours.