



## Proper Tree Mulching

Mulch is organic material placed on the soil's surface around trees and plants to enhance their growing conditions. Mulch helps maintain soil temperature and moisture, reduce water loss from soil, reduce weed competition, improve soil structure, and give landscapes a clean appearance. Often overlooked, spreading mulch around your trees is one of the easiest and most beneficial techniques that can have great impact on the health and vitality of your trees.

Ideally, mulch should be spread out around the tree to at least the farthest reaching branches, or the **“drip line”** of the tree. Tree roots extend much farther than the drip line, so mulching out as far as possible is ideal for trees. Sometimes, being unable to apply mulch to the entire root zone is understandable, but at bare minimum, a mulch ring with a diameter of one-foot for every one-inch of trunk diameter should be built to protect the **“root plate.”** It is also important to break up the **“thatch”** layer that can build up on older, more decomposed mulch. Breaking up this thatch layer allows water to get through the mulch and down to the tree roots.

It is important to not spread mulch too thick. A layer between two- and four-inches thick will provide the benefits of mulch without depriving the roots of oxygen. Mulch is often applied too thickly, resulting in the what's called “volcano mulching.” Volcano mulching is an often seen practice which is actually detrimental to trees. It is also important to ensure that mulch does not touch the trunk of the tree, which can result in the build-up of moisture and heat on the trunk.

Mulching will result in reduced maintenance for weed competition (i.e. mowing) and less watering around your trees. Proper mulching is one easy way to help maintain the health and vitality of your trees by increasing soil moisture retention, decreasing soil temperature variation, improving soil structure, and reducing weed competition.

**Drip Line:** The area around a tree covered by the outermost reaching branches.

**Root Plate:** Primary structural roots that support the weight of the tree. The diameter is generally one-foot for every one-inch of trunk diameter.

**Thatch** – Layer of partially decomposed mulch that can block water movement if not broken up.

