

1. Overmulching tree trunks creates conditions for decay

3/07

I just moved to Delaware from the Southwest, and I have noticed something incredibly odd about the landscape in the Northeast. Many commercial and even some residential landscapes have trees with huge piles of mulch around the base. Why do people do that? Is it good for the tree?

I don't really know why people pile mulch up around the base of their trees, other than because they saw it done somewhere and think it is the right thing to do. In fact, it is the wrong thing to do and can be very harmful to the tree. Mulch piled on the tree trunk creates a moist environment that is perfect for decay. If the bark on the tree trunk begins to decay, a wound is created that provides a perfect entry point for disease organisms and insects such as borers. To get the benefits of mulch - weed control and moisture retention - a 2- to 3-inch layer is all that is needed. I recommend removing all mulch mounds around trees in your own landscape and help to spread the word to neighbors and businesses that overmulching is both ugly and harmful.

News Journal

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2. Two to three inches of mulch better than heaps of it

I have noticed large mounds of mulch around trees at a number of corporate and business facilities like the mall and the hospital and several doctors' offices. Is this the correct way to apply mulch around a tree?

Mulch mounds are not the appropriate way to apply mulch around the base of a tree. In fact, mulch mounds can harm a tree, cause it to decline and in some cases even die. There is no reason to pile mulch up around the base of a tree unless you are in the business of selling mulch. Annual weeds are controlled with a very thin layer of mulch that simply prevents light from reaching the soil surface. Perennial weeds, like dandelions or thistle, will grow right through a thick layer of mulch. Mulch should be applied in a layer no thicker than two to three inches. When mulch is piled up in a

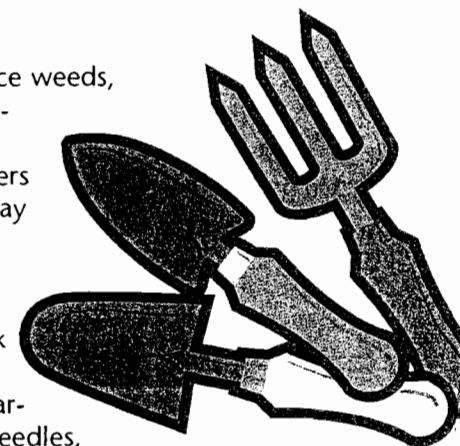
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large mound around the tree trunk it keeps the trunk wet, causes decay and provides a perfect environment for insects (such as borers) and disease organisms (such as fungi) to thrive and infest or infect the tree. I'm not sure how this practice began, but if you find those mulch mounds as unattractive as most gardeners do, tell the businesses where you see mulch mounds to stop piling up the mulch. The businesses will save money, the trees will live and we'll all be happier.

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3. MULCHING

Mulching helps reduce weeds, moderates soil temperatures, and is a visual reminder to keep mowers and string trimmers away from tree trunks. Many materials make good mulches, including shredded bark and bark chunks, composted sewage sludge, one-year-old wood chips, pine needles, and composted, shredded leaves.



- Don't use plastic sheets under the mulch because they interfere with the passage of air and water as well as inhibit root growth.
- Apply 2 to 3 inches of mulch around, but not touching, the tree trunk.
- * → Never pile up a cone of mulch around the trunk! Rodents and insects will over-winter in mulch and feed on the trunk. Cone-shaped mulch piles and thick layers of mulch also can keep water from reaching tree roots.
- * → Do not build up layers of mulch by adding a new layer each year. Each spring, rake to remove any hard crust and add only enough new mulch to maintain a 2- to 3-inch layer.
- * → Maintain a 2- to 3-inch mulch layer around, but not touching the base of the tree.

THREE ARTICLES
ABOUT MULCHING
AROUND TREES, etc.

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