



MULCHING

Mulches are materials which are placed on the soil surface around a tree and acts as a blanket similar to the cover found naturally on a forest floor. All trees try to develop such a mulched layer below their canopies. Many organic materials can be used as a mulch but bark and wood chips are the two most commonly used mulches in arboriculture. Organic mulches have the advantage that they add organic matter to the soil as they decompose thus enhancing soil fertility and plant health.

Other advantages of mulches are:

- Discouraging weeds from growing
- Allow for better use of water by controlling runoff and reduces evaporation.
- Conserving moisture during drought periods
- Increases water-holding capacity of sandy soils
- Help maintaining a uniform soil temperature (soil is kept cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter).
- Improves soil structure i.e. reduces soil compaction and erosion
- Improves soil aeration
- Protects the base of the trees from injury by equipment such as lawnmowers
- Decreases competition from lawn grasses with special reference to nutrients and moisture.

The application of mulches is a simple process:

- Weeding must be done around the tree to produce a relatively clean, weed-free soil
- Loosen the area with a fork before applying
- The mulch should be applied no more than 2,5 cm to 5 cm. Do not pile mulch more than 5cm!
- Never pile mulch against the tree trunk – to be kept at 5cm away.
- Mulch can be spread as wide as possible below tree canopies, or below entire groups of trees.

If the mulch is too thick, there is a tendency for roots to start growing shallowly. Root death can occur in dry spells. Excessive mulch may also disturb the soil moisture content and aeration. Gras clippings can cause the above problem if used as mulch causing anaerobic conditions which promote pathogens. If the trunk is covered with mulch it may cause decay of the living bark at the base of the tree.

