

Helping your plants in this Heat and Draught

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The best way to help your plants this summer is to keep their roots healthy. If they get too wet or too dry they will be stressed. Use a moisture meter or your finger to check on the amount of moisture around the roots. It is important to keep about the same amount of moisture. Roots also become stressed if they get hot or cold. A thick layer (3 ½ to 4 inch) of organic mulch will keep the evaporation at the minimum and will also keep the roots cool.

Mulch

There are basically two types of mulch, organic and inorganic. Organic mulches are the most popular and include shredded leaves, hardwood chips, bark, pine needles, compost and other plant materials. Inorganic mulches include rocks, rock chips synthetic fabrics (landscape cloth), or other non-plant materials.



Mulch is a layer of material uniformly spread on the surface of the soil under plants, but not touching the stems or trunks as this damp environment invites disease and rot. This summer because of the extreme conditions the recommended depth of mulch placed around plants is 3 ½- 4 inches. The big advantages of mulching are:

- Reduces water evaporation - un-mulched bare soil may lose twice as much water to evaporation as mulched soil, especially in hot dry weather (summer in Texomaland...).
- Cuts down on weed growth.
- Keeps the soil cool in summer which produces stronger roots and healthier plants and warm in winter which places less stress on the roots.
- Organic mulch enriches and improves the soil.
- Reduces soil erosion on slopes.

Types of mulch:

- **Bark** – this mulch is popular and easy to apply. Make sure the bag states ‘non-floating’ as some have a tendency to float away in heavy rains.
- **Clipper wood** – the clipper mulch is not uniform and not pleasing to many gardeners. If it has not been properly aged, it can create nitrogen deficiency as it breaks down so it should be used with a nitrogen fertilizer. Many people have a surplus of branches and wood and use a chipper to create their own mulch. Grayson County Precinct One on FM1419 also has shredded tree chips free to the Grayson County population.

- **Partially Decomposed Compost** – this makes excellent mulch as it is already partially broken down and will add beneficial nutrients to the soil. Needs to be replaced more often.
- **Leaves** are inexpensive, but must be shredded. Whole leaves form an undesirable 'mat' which repels water and can get moldy. Grass also does the same thing and should never be used as mulch.
- **Pebbles**, rocks, gravel chips, etc. can make great landscaping statements, but add nothing to the soil. White rocks are very bright and reflect heat to surrounding areas. With our extreme heat the plants are getting a double amount of heat, from the sun and radiated up from the rocks.
- **Landscape fabrics**, - special woven or fused fabrics allow air and water to pass through while reducing weeds and evaporation. Mostly used with other mulches on top to provide a pleasing appearance.
- **Rubber mulch** is not recommended. It deposits pollutants over time, which leach into the soil and has even been known to catch on fire...



If you use organic materials, add more mulch during the growing season, because the mulch settles and decomposes. Adding more layers assures continuous weed control, provides a clean resting place for the flowers vegetables, and creates a pleasing appearance all season long.