



## MULCH AND BARK

Something we all probably know is that mulch and bark play a critical role in landscape health through the retention of moisture. But have you considered the other benefits, like the reduction of herbicide use and nitrifying soil? A common concern with the installation of these products is how the mulch left the landscape.

Why do mulch and bark need to be replenished?

It is true that there is a certain amount removed with leaf litter pickup. This is driven either by seasonal leaf drop or through the trimming of hedges, and attempting to separate leaf litter from bark can be a challenge. The short term solution is a scheduled tree management program. This type of program will remove as much as 30% of seasonal leaf litter before it hits the ground, sometimes even more.

Another short term solution is to prolong hand (selective) pruning in the early years of the landscape. When started at the beginning, this practice can minimize the need to rake beds out during the first 5 years following installation. The central focus of this program is creating a landscape that has natural shrub formations instead of the mechanical sheared pruned look. If landscapes are designed to have hedges, the frequency of pruning them can be managed through moving material costs and labor to the application of PGR's (plant growth regulators), which also reduce the water needs of plants.



### Interesting Facts:

**The average life for 2" of mulch in the landscape is about 4 years.** Mulch levels can be depleted more quickly due to foot traffic, decomposition, wind, mature deciduous trees, and formal hedges. This is why creating a line item in the property budget that supports annual applications to replenish 25% of the landscape is critical. The spikes in property budgets can be removed by setting up a multilayer mulch program. Once completed, it's important to start the same

*\*PGR's will be covered in a future article*

For years, the benefits of mulching have been extolled as increased curb appeal and water savings. When looking closer at the value of mulching, it is found that herbicide applications fall off the deeper the mulch is. We see improved soil moisture uniformity, reduced evaporation, clay soil aeration increases, and the stabilizing of soil temperatures that allows for healthier microbial activity. Slower decaying woods are also best since they don't consume the nitrogen faster than it can be naturally replenished. As discussed previously, these organisms help save water replenishment needs.

All new landscape installations require various parts of soil amendment to numerous parts of native soil in order to establish the new plants. What most people do not realize is that most of the amendment has dissipated in 18 to 24 months. Keeping ornamental landscape beds mulched from 2"-3" is important because it helps keep a ready supply of amendment available for decomposition.



program again. Over time, these applications will become more refined and trued up. You will see the benefits in your landscape as well as the budget!

**Bark comes from the outer portion of a tree.** It has been refined to different levels that range from nuggets to shredded matter.

An organic option to consider using to mulch soil beds is wood chip.

**Wood chip includes matter from the center of the tree.**

**Eco mulch is comprised of leftover wood byproducts.**

This type of mulch is stored and allowed to decompose for the added benefit of organic material before it is chipped and ground down to the desired product.

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*Some mulch options contain dyes for aesthetic purposes that can leave behind residue and stain masonry surfaces during the staging and transfer of an install. JPA cannot control the manufacturing cure times of sourced and delivered mulch and JPA will hold no liability for the occurrence of remained residue or staining.*