



NORTHERN *Gardener* CREATING & CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Landscape Edging and Mulching

The installation of landscape edging and use of mulches adds the finishing touch to any landscape project as well as serving many beneficial purposes.

The installation of edging defines the lawn area from the rest of the landscape and provides a barrier to keep the lawn from encroaching into the landscape plantings and vice-versa. Mulches, combined with the use of weed barriers, will all but eliminate weeds in the planting bed and assist greatly in the retention of soil moisture. With the increasing emphasis on water conservation the importance of mulches cannot be underestimated.

By following a few simple instructions the finished landscape will be greatly enhanced by the

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- ✓ Organic mulches conserve moisture, control weeds, moderate soil and root temperatures and enhance root and plant growth.
- ✓ Mulching and edging can prevent lawnmower or weed trimmer damage to tree trunks.

proper installation of landscape edging, weed barriers and mulches.

Installing Landscape Edging

Many types and grades of edging are available. Vinyl, metal, stone or wood are some of the more commonly used materials for edging. When deciding upon what type and quality of landscape edging

to use, keep in mind that you will want it to last the life of the landscape.

Follow any instructions that may be provided keeping in mind that the top of the edging should be at the same level as the existing sod and planting bed as shown. When establishing the planting bed make sure to allow for the depth of any mulch that you will be applying to the bed so that the planting bed and sod are at the same level when completed.

Weed Barriers

Recently there have been a number of woven fabric types of weed barriers introduced. While they are more expensive initially, they create a better soil environment in which plants can grow. They have the ability to inhibit weed growth while permitting the exchange of water and oxygen through the woven material. These materials should greatly improve the long term success and survival of the plants.



Weed barriers, generally used under mulches, have proved to be an effective way of inhibiting the development of weeds in a landscape bed.

Black plastic has been used for a number of years and has proved acceptable as a weed barrier under mulches. Black plastic is not the best choice as a weed barrier around landscape plants.

The installation of either material is best accomplished by laying the weed barrier over the plant material and cutting a hole in the material so the fabric can be lowered to the soil. Make sure that the barrier is not tight against the base of the plant. After the barrier is in place, install the rock or organic mulch.

Mulches

Mulches provide a number of useful and beneficial functions. Mulches suppress weeds, conserve soil moisture, modify soil temperature (cooler in summer, warmer in winter) and reduce soil erosion. Mulches are applied at 2 to 4 inch depths, depending on size of material and owner preference. Refer to table #1 for coverage.

The following are some of the more commonly used mulches:

STONE OR ROCK

- Many types of decorative stone

or rock are on the market and come in a wide variety of colors and sizes. These are available both bagged and bulk, and generally the bulk rock is somewhat less expensive. Also, the larger the rock size used, the less coverage it will have. The permanence of stone is a plus over organic mulches, but it still is not maintenance free. With a good quality weed barrier installed underneath, very few weeds will come through, but it won't stop all of them. And leaves and other litter can be more difficult to clean up. With a little maintenance each year, however, rock or stone will last for the life of the landscape.

WOOD BARK, CHIPS OR SHREDDED WOOD MULCH -

These make an attractive mulch that blends in well with the landscape. They will decompose over time and provide beneficial organic matter to

the soil. For that reason, you may choose not to use a weed barrier underneath since it will slow down the decomposition and incorporation with the soil. Since the organic mulches decompose over time, they will need to be topdressed periodically with a new layer. The plus side to topdressing is that your beds will look like new again. In windy areas, you will find that the shredded mulches stay in place a little better than the larger chips.

COCOA BEAN HULLS, PINE NEEDLES, GRASS CLIPPINGS AND LEAVES

These and any number of other organic materials provide a relatively inexpensive and effective mulch. Since most of these decompose relatively quickly, you might consider adding a high nitrogen fertilizer when applying the mulch, because the decomposition process will tend to take some nitrogen out of the soil. As with the wood mulches, you will need to replenish the material periodically. Since weed barriers are seldom used with these types of mulch, you may want to consider the using pre-emergent herbicide to reduce weed growth.

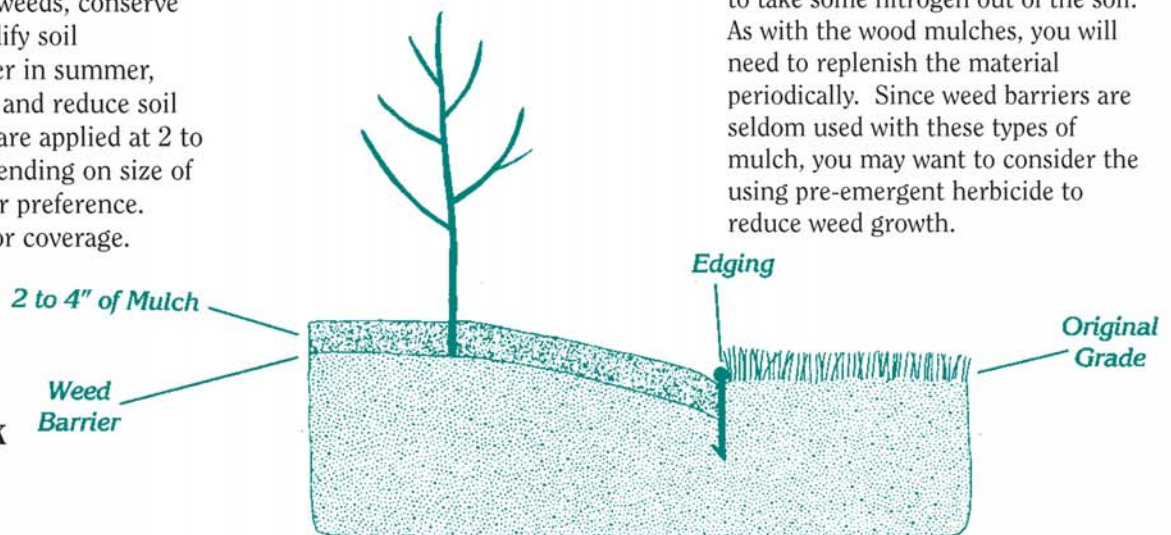


Figure #1

Mulch Depth	Approx. coverage per cubic yard
2 inches	120 square feet
3 inches	100 square feet
4 inches	80 square feet

1 cubic yard = 27 cubic feet
coverage will vary depending on size of material or ask the garden center personnel regarding coverage on bulk mulches.



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