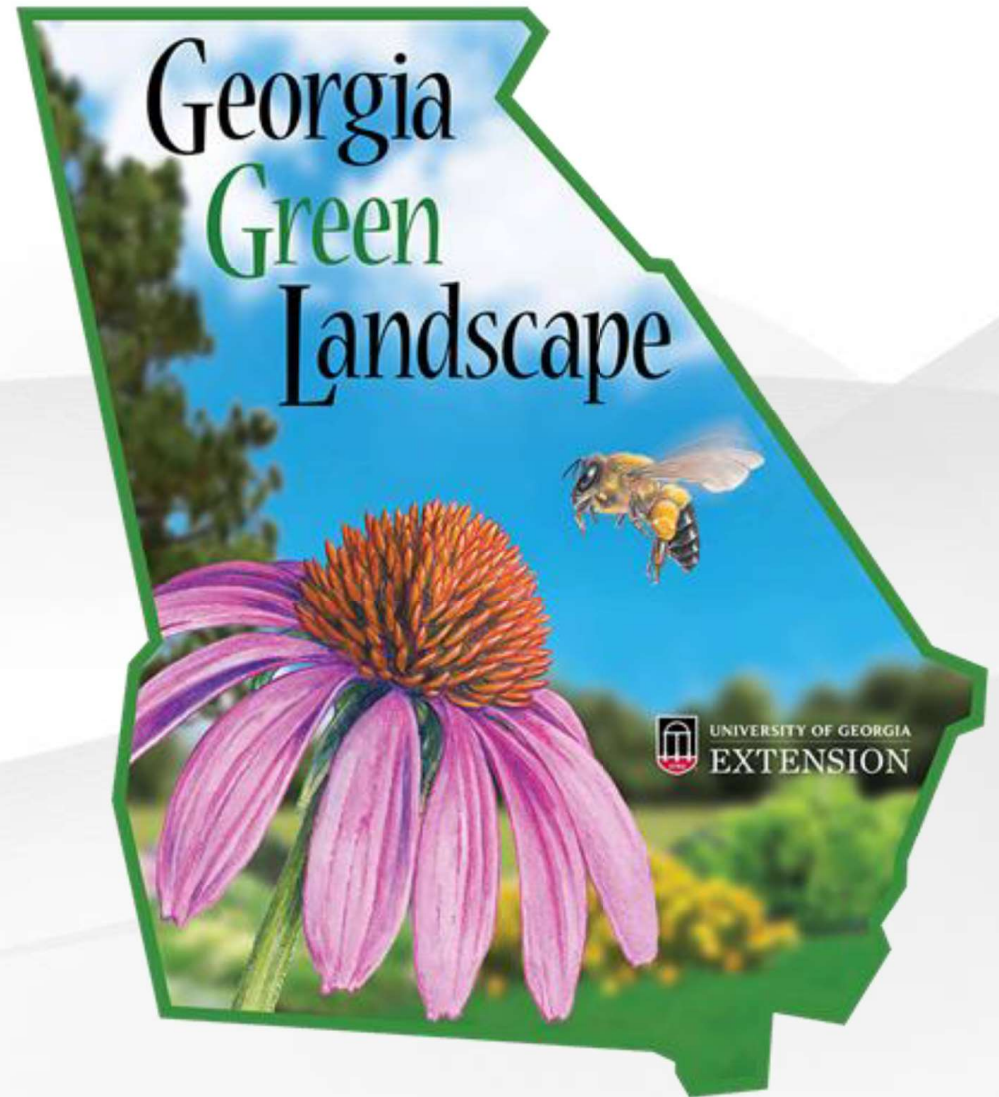



Mulching in the Landscape

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The following presentation is part of the University of Georgia Extension service Georgia Green Landscapes program funded by the Center for Urban Agriculture. These guidance series will help Georgia residents create certified sustainable Georgia Landscapes, protecting our natural resources for future generations.



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What is Mulch?

- Mulch is a soil cover that helps conserve water and reduce weed pressures. It can also help build soil quality and structure over time and serve as habitat for beneficial organisms (insects, earthworms, bacteria, fungi, etc.) and wildlife. Mulch is a vital component of a sustainable Georgia Green Landscape.

Benefits of Mulching

- Suppresses weeds
- Reduces soil erosion
- Moderates soil temperatures (cooler in summer, warmer in winter)
- Conserves soil moisture
- Promotes earth worms and in turn, aeration
- Increases organic matter and fertility in the soil
- Mulch mimics a mature forest floor and offers similar soil building properties

Types of Mulch



- Leaves
- Pine straw
- Pine bark
- Hay
- Mixed hardwood
- Melaleuca
- Eucalyptus
- Utility
- Cypress
- Rubber
- Rock

Leaves



- Natural and free
- Requires no production and harvest
- Nutrient rich
- Closest mimic to the forest floor and natural processes
- Best habitat for beneficial organisms and wildlife
- The best fertilizer for any plant is it's own decomposing leaves (trees and grass included)

Pine Straw



- Cheap or free
- When bought, is raked from pine plantations that produce wood and paper
- Can often find in raked piles for garbage pickup
- Not the best for foot traffic
- Sustainable
- Doesn't wash away
- May slightly lower soil pH over time
- Lightest to move and handle

Pine Bark



- Byproduct of pine production for paper and wood
- Sustainable
- Comes in various sizes
- Can float or wash away
- Decomposes slowly
- May lower soil pH over time
- Great for acid loving plants

Hay



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- NOT RECOMMENDED
- Often cheap or free
- Usually contains weed seeds
- Hay is often treated with herbicides that remain active and may kill or damage garden plants (this also poses a problem with manure as some herbicides can remain active even after a horse or cow digests the hay)

Mixed Hardwood Mulch



- Produced from scrap lumber, recycled pallets, or trees that were too small to use for wood or paper manufacture
- Low in nutrients
- Recycled/minimizing waste debris
- Available in several colors

Melaleuca Mulch



- Mulch is processed from invasive trees
- Cured at high temperature to kill seeds
- Available in several colors
- Low in nutrients
- Increases removal of invasive species
- Not attractive to termites
- Doesn't float

Eucalyptus Mulch



- Trees grown and harvested in Central and South Florida just for mulch
- Available in several colors
- Low in nutrients

Utility Mulch



- Created by trimming trees in power line right of ways
- Sold or given away by utility companies
- May have uneven texture and can contain weed seeds or trash
- Usually free and a good recycled resource
- Limits waste and tree harvesting

Cypress Mulch



- NOT RECOMMENDED
- May be made from waste wood created by the manufacture of flooring, fencing, etc. but may come from trees harvested from wetlands for mulch which is very ecologically damaging
- Origins are hard to determine

Rubber Mulch



- NOT RECOMMENDED
- Does not add nutrients or soil structure
- May leach toxins
- Does not decompose
- Holds heat
- Not recommended for mulching plants (useful on playgrounds and similar areas)

Rock



- Does not decompose
- Does not add nutrients, habitat, or soil structure
- Holds heat
- Does not retain moisture
- If used, install landscape cloth first to prevent rock from sinking into the soil
- Prone to weed and debris issues (fallen leaves, etc.) and may need to be cleaned regularly
- Certain rocks and shell can alter soil pH
- Better for paths and walkways than as a mulch

Mulch and Plants (Herbaceous and Shrubs)



- Do not pile mulch on or cover plants
- Leave a small space between mulch and the stem
- Mulch 2-3" deep

Mulch and Trees



<https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/not-recommended.shtml>

- Never pile mulch against the base of a tree (volcano mulch)
- Root flare should be exposed and there should be a few inches between mulch and the trunk
- A mulch ring to at least the drip line is the best practice for tree health as trees compete with grass and other plants for nutrient and water resources
- Mulch 2-3" deep
- Best mulch for trees is their own leaves

Certification Checklist Items:

- Keep tree root flares exposed and leave a few inches of space between mulch and the trunk. Do not pile mulch against the base of the trunk.
- Use a tree's own leaves as mulch.
- Form a mulch ring 2 to 3 inches deep to the tree drip line to help compete against grass and other plants for resources.
- Do not pile mulch to cover small plants. Leave a small space between mulch and the stem while adding mulch 2 to 3 inches deep elsewhere.

Questions?

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