

Mulch - The perfect groundcover!

Bellevue Nursery is an advocate of mulching! **Mulch** is defined as material that is typically applied on top of the soil around plants in order to:

- moderate soil temperatures (keep cooler in summer and warmer in winter)
- enrich the soil
- prevent soil erosion, compaction, runoff
- conserve moisture
- suppress weeds
- dress up the garden

Mulching is sometimes referred to as top-dressing the soil.

Large particle mulch, such as straw, stone, bark nuggets, nut shells, and pine needles, are often used to suppress weeds or to offer winter protection. They are usually removed after they have served their purpose since they break down very slowly or not at all.

Organic compost makes a great mulch any time of the year.* Compost eventually breaks down and works its way into the soil, adding nutrients as it decomposes and encouraging earthworm and biological activity.

Grass clippings and dried leaves can also be used, however, they can compact in wet weather or blow away on windy days. Make sure to leave at least half of the clippings on your lawn, and use only if they have *not* been treated with herbicides or toxic pesticides. Use only dry, aged leaves and shred them before applying as mulch.

Sheet plastic holds in warmth, so peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and melons are great candidates for plastic mulch in the cooler months of summer. Many plastic sheets are not permeable, so ensure that your plants are getting adequate water during the hot, dry months.

Newspaper is a biodegradable substitute for sheet plastic. A layer of 6-12 sheets helps to smother weeds and provides a permeable base on which to layer organic compost and/or topsoil. (Laying down sheets can be a tedious process, especially if you are trying to mulch around existing plants.)

TIPS:

- **Know your soil.** Mulch can exacerbate poor drainage by trapping even more water around the roots, leading to root rot.
- **Give your plants some "breathing room".** Do not mulch too thickly (more than 4") or too close to the base of plants or building foundations. Too thick of a layer attracts critters and pests and inhibits evaporation.
- **Remove weeds before applying mulch,** since actively growing weeds can still make their way through the mulch.

*Bellevue Nursery recommends **Soil Building Conditioner** as the perfect organic mulch to protect and nourish your plants!