

Suggested mulch types for hands-on activity

Print this sheet, and stick names and descriptions on index cards.

<p>Landscape fabric</p>	<p>Cost: Very high</p> <p>Durability: Long—up to 5 years when properly maintained with organic or rock mulch on top</p> <p>Advantages: Very effective, long lasting, allows air and water penetration.</p> <p>Disadvantages: Expense, installation somewhat more complicated.</p> <p>Special uses: Excellent mulch for permanent plantings of woody landscape plants. Usually topped with organic mulch or rock to make it attractive and long lasting.</p>
<p>Black plastic</p>	<p>Cost: Inexpensive</p> <p>Durability: Breaks down rapidly</p> <p>Advantages: Cheap.</p> <p>Disadvantages: Not permeable to air and water. Unattractive. Breaks down rapidly.</p> <p>Special uses: Not recommended.</p>
<p>Grass clippings</p>	<p>Cost: Free</p> <p>Durability: A few months</p> <p>Advantages: Readily available.</p> <p>Disadvantages: May contain weed seeds, mats and reduces water penetration, especially if applied too thick and not dried out before applied. If turf treated with pesticides can contain residues.</p> <p>Special uses: Vegetable gardens or annual flower beds, but apply in thin layers weekly so it can dry.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Ground bark</p>	<p>Cost: Moderate</p> <p>Durability: Decomposes fairly rapidly, must be replenished</p> <p>Advantages: Attractive. Decomposes into soil.</p> <p>Disadvantages: Decomposes fairly rapidly unless used with landscape fabric. Weed seeds grow in it easily and must be pulled out. Can tie up nitrogen as it decomposes when mixed in soil.</p> <p>Special uses: Don't apply more than 2 inches deep. Best for short-term mulching in annual beds or for use on top of landscape fabric.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Compost</p>	<p>Cost: Free if home made</p> <p>Durability: Breaks down rapidly, must be replenished</p> <p>Advantages: Free or inexpensive. Good source of organic matter.</p> <p>Disadvantages: May harbor weed seeds if not properly composted. Holds water, if placed too close to tree trunks can promote crown disease. Weeds grow easily in it, must be rogued out.</p> <p>Special uses: Apply at about 2-inch depth. Use in annual beds or vegetable gardens for short-term mulching.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Peat moss</p>	<p>Cost: Relatively expensive for organic mulch</p> <p>Durability: Moderate for organic mulch</p> <p>Advantages: Contains few weed seeds. Adds acidity to alkaline soils.</p> <p>Disadvantages: May blow away. May resist wetting when dry. Encourages shallow rooting.</p> <p>Special uses: Better as a soil amendment for alkaline soils when well incorporated than a mulch.</p>

<p>Rock</p>	<p>Cost: Relatively expensive</p> <p>Durability: Lasts forever</p> <p>Advantages: Doesn't need to be replenished. Doesn't blow away.</p> <p>Disadvantages: May get too hot and injure roots. Hard to clean. Hard to pull weeds out. Children throw it. Can get into lawn mowers.</p> <p>Special uses: Best if used as a top mulch over a landscape fabric in non-planted areas.</p>
<p>Medium-sized bark chips</p>	<p>Cost: Moderate for organic mulch</p> <p>Durability: Longer lasting than smaller particle organic mulches</p> <p>Advantages: Attractive, slowly improves soil as it decomposes. Longer lasting than finer mulches.</p> <p>Disadvantages: Like other organic mulches needs to be replenished.</p> <p>Special uses: Excellent as a topping for landscape fabric. Best overall choice for an organic mulch to be used without landscape fabric where beds are fairly long lasting. Apply 3 to 4 inches deep and keep replenishing.</p>

Wood chips	<p>Cost: Can be inexpensive</p> <p>Durability: Decompose faster than bark chips</p> <p>Advantages: May be available free. Allows for recycling of wood material.</p> <p>Disadvantages: Where there is a lot of runoff may float away. If incorporated into soil may tie up nitrogen. Needs to be replenished. Some woods may contain chemicals toxic to some plants.</p> <p>Special uses: Apply at 3 to 5 inches in beds. Use for permanent beds that are not frequently cultivated. A good topping for landscape fabric.</p>
Newspaper (shredded or sheets)	<p>Cost: Free</p> <p>Durability: Decomposes rapidly if kept wet</p> <p>Advantages: Free. A cheap alternative to landscape fabric.</p> <p>Disadvantages: Unattractive unless covered up. Newspapers printed with soy based inks and are safe, but don't use glossy parts—they may have soil contaminants. If not shredded can interfere with water penetration (although you can use it on top of drip).</p> <p>Special uses: 2-3 sheets of newspapers can be placed under organic mulches in landscape beds on top of drip irrigation and remain effective for a whole season. Shredded newspaper can be used in vegetable or annual beds.</p>