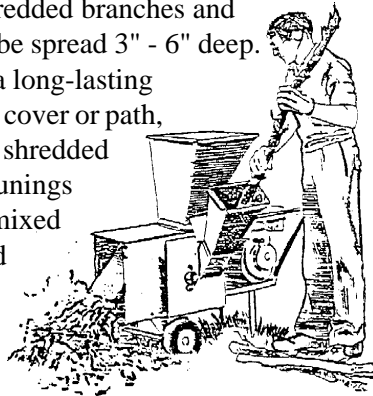


## Chipped or Shredded Branches & Prunings:

Chipped or shredded branches and prunings may be spread 3" - 6" deep. To be used as a long-lasting mulch, ground cover or path, the chipped or shredded branches or prunings should not be mixed with other yard debris.



## Sawdust:

Sawdust and other finely-ground woody materials can be used on the surface, but do not mix them into the soil. These finely-ground materials, which have not been composted, may tie up nitrogen in your soil, causing your plants to become yellow and stunted. Sawdust and other finely-ground woody materials could be better used as a bulking agent in your compost pile.

## APPLYING MULCH MATERIALS

Weed the area to be mulched before applying the mulch. For best results, mulch can be spread around any plant as far as the distance of its outermost branches (this is called the drip line), or it can cover your entire garden bed. Mulch can be spread to a depth of six inches if water is able to penetrate and it does not smother the roots of the plant being mulched. Three inches of mulch is safe for most woody plants, and up to eight inches can be used for large trees. Thick mulches are harmful to shallow-rooted plants, such as rhododendrons and azaleas. Mulch should be kept a few inches away from the trunks of trees and shrubs to prevent disease, insects and mice from injuring the bark.

## Tools for Mulch-Making:

A rotary lawn mower run across dry leaves will make a fine-textured mulch for annuals, perennials and small plants. A small electric chipper will make a fine-textured mulch of woody branches and prunings up to one and one quarter inch in thickness. Gas powered chipper-shredders of 5 to 8 horsepower, that process materials up to three inches in thickness, can be rented or purchased. Large gas powered chipper-shredders are able to handle woody debris up to six inches in diameter, and are available at most rental shops. In general, the larger the chipper-shredder, the faster the mulch-making!

**Note:** be sure to follow all safety instructions provided with the equipment you borrow, rent or purchase, and **ALWAYS** wear protective clothing, gloves and ear & eye protection.

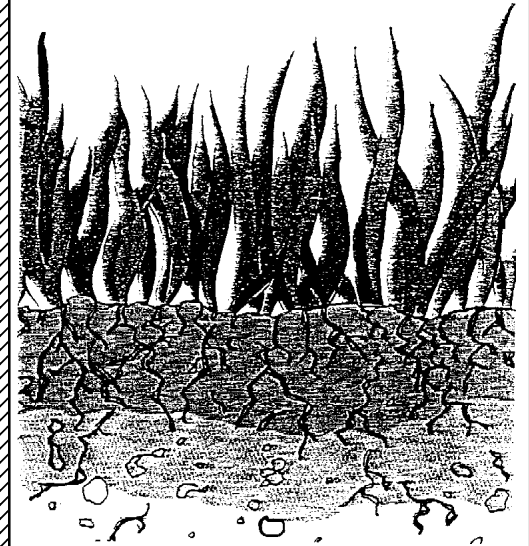
For more information regarding composting or other waste reduction and recycling options in Douglas County, contact:

**Countywide Solid Waste Programs**  
**(509) 886-0899**



*This recycled paper is recyclable*

# MAKING MULCHES FROM YARD DEBRIS



*within*  
**DOUGLAS  
COUNTY**

*This brochure teaches you what  
mulch is, what its benefits are,  
how to make it, and  
how to use it.*

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*Yard debris, such as grass clippings, autumn leaves and tree and shrub prunings, can be used as a valuable mulch to improve the health of your plants, eliminate weeds, and save on your disposal costs. This brochure explains how to use your yard debris to your benefit.*

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## What is Mulch?

**Mulch** is any material such as grass clippings, leaves, compost or wood chips that is spread over the surface of the soil. Using mulch is a simple way to recycle yard debris and improve your landscape and garden.

## What does mulch do?

Mulch conserves water and keeps the soil moist for good plant growth. It keeps down weeds, which is good for your plants and reduces the need for herbicides. Mulch benefits plants by acting as insulation, keeping soil temperatures from becoming too hot or cold. A layer of mulch protects flat and sloping ground from soil erosion, and also stops soil compaction caused by walking or driving on the soil. In addition, mulch provides ideal living conditions for earthworms and other soil organisms which are necessary for healthy soils and plants. When mulch breaks down, it becomes humus, which feeds the soil. A good mulch, made from your yard debris, will do all of this. Your yard debris can provide you with a mulch which is readily available, free, easy to apply, and will stay in place without much effort!

## General Rules for Mulching

### *Annuals and Perennials: (both flowers and vegetables)*

The material used for mulch in annual and perennial gardens should break down in a relatively short time, such as grass clippings and leaves. This kind of non-woody mulch can be turned under when spading your annual and perennial garden without mixing in persistent, woody materials.



### *Trees and Shrubs:*

Trees and shrubs should be mulched with a thick layer of shredded or chipped branches or prunings, which will look good, last a long time, and require little maintenance.



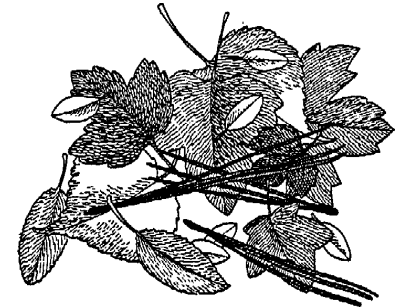
### *Paths:*

Paths can also be covered with shredded or chipped branches or prunings, in layers as thick as is practical, for longer wear and to keep down weeds. To keep paths weed-free even longer, put down layers of cardboard before spreading the mulch.

## MULCH MATERIALS & THEIR USES

### Grass Clippings:

Grass clippings can be spread regularly in thin layers over vegetables and flower beds, or mixed with leaves and spread in a thicker layer. Spread grass clippings no more than 1" thick to prevent matting, and so water can penetrate into the soil. If a herbicide has been applied to your lawn, compost the grass clippings in an active (hot) compost pile before using them as a mulch.



### Leaves:

The leaves of deciduous trees can be spread as mulch in the fall. Over the winter, the leaves will break down and will be ready to be turned into the soil in the spring. Evergreen needles can also be used, but they take longer to break down, and should not be turned into the soil. Evergreen needles make a good mulch for acid-loving plants, such as rhododendrons and azaleas.