ENVIRONMENTAL CONCEPTS LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, INC.

Featured Article

MULCH

When properly applied around shrubs and groundcover, mulch is one of the most effective, yet simple means for maintaining a healthy landscape. Its benefits include nutrient replenishment and soil moisture retention. Applying mulch to your planting beds will minimize water loss through evaporation, which can cut down on watering by as much as 25% (up to 45% when combined with drip irrigation). Mulching also helps to reduce maintenance by suppressing weeds and lessening erosion.

There are a variety of organic and inorganic materials that can be used for mulch, such as leaves, grass clippings, sawdust, straw, geotextile fabrics, and pulverized rubber. The most common materials used for mulching are woodchips and bark, which can also offer a well-groomed appearance to your landscaping.

Woodchips are a byproduct of trimming trees. Limbs, branches, and leaves are run through a chipper producing wood fragments, typically up to four inches in length. They can also be mixed with soil, producing a rich organic material. Bark chips are also a byproduct of the tree industry and come in a variety of sizes, ranging from larger pieces, called “tanbark,” to smaller sizes referred to as “nuggets.” They may also be shredded into thin strands, commonly called “gorilla hair.”

Mulch should be applied to a depth of three to four inches. Organic mulches compress and decompose over time, so it will become necessary to replenish them at least once every few years. In some cases, you may have to completely remove and replaced the mulch if overly compacted or decayed.

Mulching can have a negative effect on plant materials if applied improperly. Always pull the mulch away from the base of trees and shrubs, exposing bare soil. Running a rake over old mulch will break up the matted layers, restore new life to the mulch, and refresh its appearance. Wood product materials should be nitrogen-enhanced or well composted (if mixed with soil), to ensure replenishment of nutrients back into the soil.