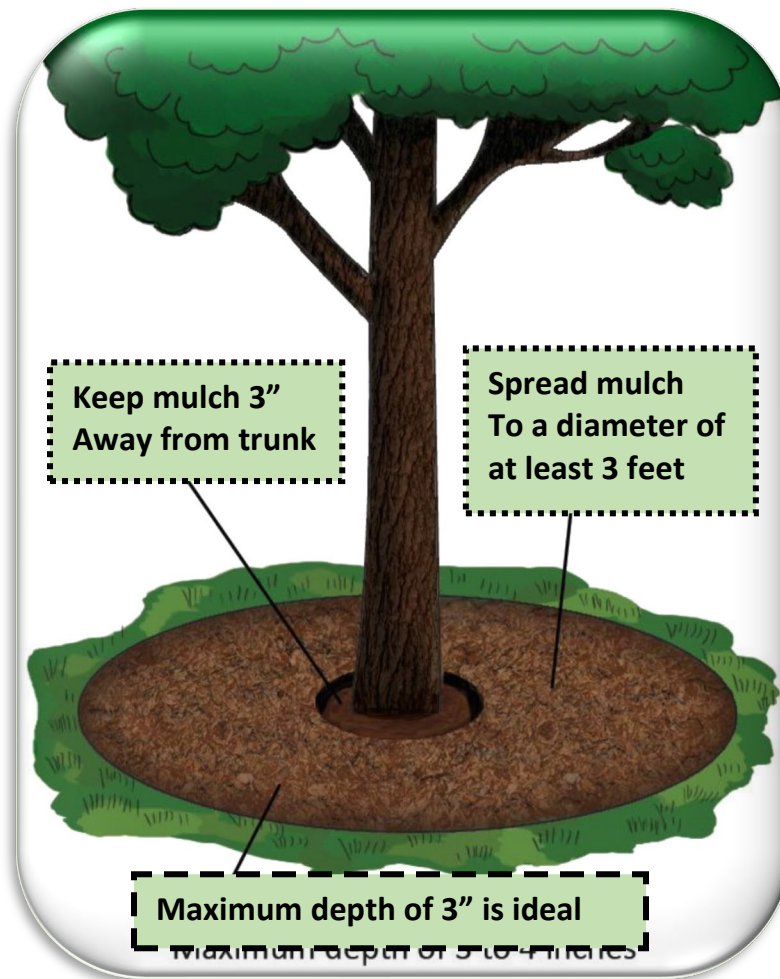


How to Properly Apply Mulch



Incorrect Mulching Can KILL Your Trees

It causes too much moisture to build up around the root ball. This can lead to fungus, rot and decay and ultimately lead to the trees death.

The proper way to mulch is to allow the base of the tree to be exposed. The best way to do this is to look for the flare out at the base of the trunk. This allows the tree to "breathe", rather, it allows the moisture to escape, preventing the growth of fungus and minimizing rot and decay.



Girdling Roots

When a tree is “volcano mulched”, meaning it is piled high up on the trunk of the tree, the roots mistake the mulch for soil and grow in the wrong direction. This causes girdling roots.

As roots grow up and around the trunk, they can strangle and kill the tree over time as the trunk grows thicker!

The roots of a tree are supposed to spread out from the tree, but here the roots are circling the trunk, which cuts off the flow of water and nutrients. Your tree can develop these roots, called stem girdling roots, if you use a mulch volcano.



These roots were excavated and painted, which helps us see them better in the photo. Photo courtesy Linda Haugen, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Sometimes, mulch can knit together and start to mat—shredded hardwood in particular. Matted mulch can hinder rain and sunlight from soaking through and feeding the plant roots beneath the soil. To prevent mats, removal is not always the answer. Instead, fluff the mulch using a rake or cultivator and then add more mulch to the top. If, however, the matted mulch has developed a fungus or mold, treat it with a fungicide or remove it completely, depending on the severity of the damage.

Mulch will eventually decompose into soil. If you continue to add mulch over the top it can also become too high around a tree. If this is the case, you will need to take out some of the mulch/soil that has built up over time if the mulch is more than 3” deep. To check, you will need to remove the mulch around the tree to the level of the original soil to see the actual depth.



(left) Mulch volcano, (middle) cutaway showing mulch piled around trunk, (right) proper spreading in foreground

Remember the 3-3-3 Rule

Create a ring of mulch around your tree, 3 inches deep in a 3-foot radius from the trunk, making sure to leave a 3-inch space right around the tree trunk.

Avoid volcanoes. Don't pile the mulch against the trunk of your tree. When you're finished, the mulch should look more like a doughnut than a volcano.

