



sustainable solutions

growing a greener city

may 2010 · easy mulching · out-of-the-box · plant of the month · fun workshops

"Mulch is our unsung hero, our hidden mighty miracle maker. It's the 'living sponge' in our landscape that saves on water during the dry months and captures rainwater during the rainy season. If we mulched every yard we could conserve a tremendous amount of precious water in L.A." - Andy Lipkis, TreePeople Founder

It's Easy to Mulch

In urban areas, the ground is routinely cleared of leaves and other debris falling from trees. This creates soil that is dry, compacted and unhealthy for trees and plants. In a natural forest, fallen leaves, branches and bark accumulate to form a layer of organic matter – or mulch - over the ground. This mulch feeds the ground with nutrients as it breaks down and also acts like a sponge, helping the soil absorb and hold water and also replenish groundwater supplies.

Use a layer of mulch in your yard or parkway and you'll need less water for irrigation and improve the health of your trees and plants. Try mulching by allowing fallen leaves and other plant matter to stay on the ground. After all, it's only waste if you throw it away!

1. Look for good places to mulch.
 - large areas of bare, compacted soil
 - bare soil areas in garden beds or parkways
 - depressions or "swales" where water flows
 - around trees – 1" to 2" from the trunk extending to the outermost branches, the drip line
2. Calculate how much mulch you will need. (See page 2)
3. Have mulch delivered or make your own. (See page 2)
4. Remove any grass or weeds from the area.
5. Break up the soil surface, if highly compacted.
6. Place a 3" deep layer of mulch on the soil. Keep the mulch 1" to 2" away from the base of trees and shrubs to prevent trunk rot.

That's it! After you are done, you will see that Andy was right – there are easy, creative ways to improve your property and our environment. In fact, if you had fun and are enjoying the benefits of a mulched yard, why not have a pile of mulch delivered and invite your neighbors to mulch too? Host a mulch party!

Each month, TreePeople's Sustainable Solutions Program will show you simple ways to transform yards and communities into Functioning Community Forests. We'll feature celebrities who are creating these same small but powerful changes in their own yards and gardens, providing helpful tips and resources. Join us and the rest of L.A. as we make our region a more sustainable, fun, safe and healthy place to live, work and play!

Next Month: Mapping Your Yard

photo by Laurie Kaufman



Linda's List

Linda Eremita, TreePeople's Senior ISA Certified Arborist, has the following suggestions for your April gardening fun:

Climate Appropriate Plant of the Month

Catalina perfume (*Ribes viburnifolium*)

This groundcover prefers dry shade, which makes it perfect for planting under oaks. Catalina perfume has nice, arching branches making a 3' to 4' high and 6' to 12' wide plant. It can take a deep watering once a month in summer, but not if planted under oaks. Catalina perfume is good for erosion control on dry slopes with filtered shade. It's lovely maroon flowers are produced mid-winter into spring. The leaves and stems have a spicy fragrance.

Upcoming Workshops

May 8, 2010 - Fruit Tree Care

May 22, 2010 - Pruning Workshop



Photo courtesy of www.laspillitas.com

Out-of-the-Box

Renters can mulch too!

For those of us in apartments or who rent our homes, finding a gardening space or getting permission from the landlord can be a challenge. TreePeople has a few ideas that might help!

Mulch can be used in potted plants. Try bark and leaves, or even lovely gravel or glass pebbles. You can also talk to the property owner or manager, it might be easier than you think. Here are a few tips to help you in your conversation:

- » Volunteer to do it yourself.
- » If your apartment is a multi-unit building, offer to organize all your neighbors and make it a fun community event.
- » Let your landlord know that mulch can improve property value and lower water bills.

If you absolutely have to get your hands in some mulch ASAP, here are few other ideas:

- » Join a community garden.
- » Come to a TreePeople tree care or planting event and bring a friend.

Visit www.treepeople.org.

Mulching Tips & Resources

- **free mulch:** You can have truckloads of mulch delivered to your home for free! For Los Angeles City residents, call the Urban Forestry Division at (213) 923-3109. They deliver a minimum of 6 yards. Delivery must be to a wide driveway or the truck must have direct yard access. For mulch from an arborist, look in the phone book under "Tree Service" & let them know you don't want chips from a diseased tree.
- **purchased mulch:** Bags of bark can be purchased at local nurseries or home improvement centers. Do not use sawdust or wood shavings, these won't allow enough air into the soil. Mulch chips should be between 1" and 3" in size. Smaller pieces smother the soil and larger pieces get kicked around or can cause tripping.
- **do-it-yourself mulch:** When you prune trees, you can make your own mulch using a chipper. Check your local home improvement center to purchase or rent a chipper/shredder.

How Much Mulch Do I Need?

Mulch is measured by cubic feet. Use the following to find out how much you need:

1. Measure the width and length (in feet) of the spaces you want to mulch.
 2. Measure the width by the length to get the area: Width x Length = Area.
 3. Multiply the area by .25 to get the cubic feet: Area x .25 feet (depth of mulch) = cubic feet.
 4. Divide the cubic feet by 27 to get the cubic yards: cubic feet / 27 = cubic yard.
- Example: For a 10' x 10' area that you want to cover with 3" of mulch, you'd multiply 100 by .25, which is 25. Divide 25 by 27 and you get .925, or about 1 cubic yard. So, 1 cubic yard covers about 100 square feet.