Community Project Toolkit: Mulch Distribution
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TreePeople’s Community Education Program

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12601 Mulholland Dr.
Los Angeles, CA
www.treepeople.org
Who We Are

TreePeople

TreePeople inspires and supports the people of LA to come together to plant and care for trees, harvest the rain, and renew depleted landscapes. We unite with communities to grow a greener, shadier and more water-secure city at homes, neighborhoods, schools and in the local mountains. We work with volunteer and community leaders using our unique Citizen Forester model, and we influence government agencies for a healthy, thriving Los Angeles.

The Drought and Lessons from Australia

During this time of drought it is important to relook at how we value water, lessons we can learn, and ways to use water wisely. In 2014 TreePeople led a delegation of top policymakers from local, state and federal levels to Australia. The group experienced the innovative approaches that can be transferred to California to ensure that our water is managed in the most efficient, sustainable way first-hand. We are currently translating these solutions for widespread implementation in the Southern California region.

Community Involvement

Communities played a key role in Australia’s ability to be resilient during the drought. Leading a TreePeople project is a rewarding way to positively affect the neighborhood and support a resilient community. Our Citizen Forester model gives ordinary people the extraordinary ability to improve their environment by planting and caring for trees and incorporating “forest-mimicking” technologies into their urban landscape. This work will grow for decades and inspire countless others – helping to ensure a sustainable community working together to create positive change.

TreePeople Community Project Toolkits

Community Project Toolkits are designed to guide users through the process of developing and implementing a community project. It is organized around a timeline to follow and steps to take that culminate with a community project/event. It also provides guidance on promotion, volunteers, evaluation, and recommended tools and resources to support the process.
Community Distribution: Mulch

How it Works
TreePeople will partner with your community to help arrange a mulch distribution event! We will guide you through the whole process from start to finish; including sourcing high-quality mulch, securing a site, and promoting the distribution to friends and neighbors. We will also provide helpful tips on proper application. A mulch distribution can happen as an annual event, a recurring event (i.e. at a farmer’s market or community garden workday), or as part of a neighborhood workshop.

Why Mulch?
Mulch is a valuable addition to any landscape. It is a crucial part of making any yard more climate-resilient! Mulch acts like a sponge when it rains - slowing evaporation and allowing water to be held and slowly seep into the ground. This keeps temperatures lower because wet soil or vegetation keeps the atmosphere much cooler than dry landscapes or concrete surfaces. Mulch also improves the health of the soil because much-needed water stays on the property instead of running into the street. This is a big deal because there are billions of microorganisms that live in the earth and feed our trees, plants, flowers and vegetable gardens! They need water to thrive! Mulch also provides key nutrients to these microbial populations when it breaks down and decomposes.

Why a Community Distribution?
By hosting a community mulch distribution you are facilitating the use of a valuable resource that will make the community cooler, healthier and more beautiful! For individuals, getting mulching can take time to arrange and may not happen. By arranging a community drop of mulch, it helps to facilitate the process for everyone and ensure that good, free mulch is provided. What a great excuse for a block party!

TreePeople’s Role:
• Act as liaison with providers of mulch.
• Provide support, as needed, on distribution event set-up and production.
• Provide educational materials for the public, including how-to’s on how to apply mulch.

Community Group’s Role:
• Provide leadership in setting up and running the event.
• Ensure enough participation to use up all the mulch.
• Promote the event in the community.
Preparation Checklist & Timeline

Use the following checklist to plan and complete the first steps. Once a date is set, use the timeline to complete the necessary tasks needed to ensure a successful event.

The most important step in a successful mulch distribution is a well-thought plan that includes details of how traffic will flow, how mulch will be delivered from the pile to an individual, and what equipment will best match the plan.

Checklist

☑ Choose a location

- Site needs to be large enough to handle a load of mulch. A typical drop of mulch is 15 cubic yards (approximately 10’ x 20’ x 5’). This is about 50 wheelbarrels.
- An ideal location is a parking lot, double-wide driveway, schoolyard or other similar large, flat area with the ability for multiple people to access the mulch pile at once.
- Events should not be held on public streets unless the street is closed to traffic and there is a plan that allows people to get mulch and take it away safely.

☑ Choose a date

- Weekend events are the most popular.
- Determine if it makes sense for the distribution to be part of another event on the calendar such as a Farmer’s Market or Street Fair.
- Check with the local community to ensure there are no other events happening.
- If held on a campus, check with school administration to ensure the date is available and can be reserved.
- Avoid local holidays or religious observances.
- Plan back-up dates.

☑ Choose a time

- Plan to have the event open to the public for 2 hours. Typically, the best hours are 9 - 11am; 1 - 3pm; 2 - 4pm. Evening hours of 6 - 8pm or 7 - 9pm also work if the site is well lit to ensure public safety.
- Include time for set-up and breakdown.
Get Permission

- Depending on where your distribution will take place, make sure you have permission from the owner if on private property, city if on public property, and principal if on a school site.

Secure Materials

- Check that at least 1 or more 6’ tables are available for use.
- If needed, consider renting or getting a table for use at the local Councilmember’s office.
- Check that at least 1 or 2 tents or pop up canopies are available use if there is no shaded area for folks manning the tables.
- Arrange to have TreePeople educational materials at the event.
- Provide or plan to have participants bring shovels, wheelbarrows or other tools needed to load and carry mulch.

See page 3 for list of materials needed.
Timeline

It takes 1 to 2 months to plan and produce a community distribution event. Once you have chosen a date for the distribution, work backwards.

6 - 8 Weeks Before the Event

- Secure a date.
- Look for and secure a location.
- Evaluate the site and ensure it will work for the distribution. (See page 1).
- Present the mulch distribution event plan to key stakeholders to get permission, if needed.
- Work with TreePeople to see if they can support promotion.

4 - 6 Weeks Before the Event

- Create a promotion plan, including fliers for distribution (See page 5).
- Write an ad or other promotional information for twitter/Facebook/email blast, and more. (See page 5).
- Begin promotion of the event to get as many community members involved as possible.
- If needed, secure tables and a tent for use (see sidebar).
- Conduct volunteer training on how to educate the public on how to educate rain barrels (use the How to Get and Apply Mulch fact sheet in the Resource section on page 7).
- Arrange for TreePeople educational materials. Email Sustsol@treepeople.org.

1 Week Before the Event

- Coordinate with the contact person at your location about entry time, getting keys, on-site route for mulch drop.
- Determine set up, including where mulch will be located.
- Create signage (see page 5).
- Continue promotion.

Supply List

- 1 - 2 tables
  - If not readily available, check with the local Council District office
- 1 – 2 shade tents, if needed
- Directional and informational signage
- Shovels and /or pitchforks for loading mulch
- Encourage people to bring plastic buckets, wheelbarrows or use the back of a truck to transport mulch
2 Days Before the Event

- Get supplies together including tables.

Event Day!

- Remember to take pictures. TreePeople would love to have pictures and stories shared on their Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- Have FUN and enjoy the event!

After the Event

- Make it count. Share what you did with TreePeople. Email Sustsol@treepeople.org.
- Return tables.
- Send a thank you note to the site host.
- Complete an evaluation of the event (see page 6).

Social Media

Remember to share the excitement of the distribution event on social media.
- Use the following to share with TreePeople:
  - Instagram: @TreePeoplela
  - Twitter: @TreePeople_org
Promotion

Consider the following when creating a plan:

Who do you want to reach in the community?
- Who is your audience?
- Will some materials need to be in another language?
  - TreePeople has educational materials in Spanish

What do you want to communicate?
- The benefits of mulch!
- Date, time and location
- Any additional activities happening, such as drives, etc.
- Phone number or email for more information (optional)

How do you want to communicate?
- Create and send ads
  - Local newsletters
  - Local newspapers
  - Radio stations
- Create and distribute fliers
  - Community centers
  - Local businesses
- Social media
  - Online blogs and newsletters
  - Facebook Event
  - Twitter

Signage

Consider the following:
- Large, easy to read lettering
- **Directional signage**
  - If the mulch distribution is part of another event.
  - Directional signs should be placed in places that allow people to keep moving toward the destination with placement at key junctions.
- **Identification signage**
  - Signage and/or banners located at the distribution site are used to ensure that people know they have arrived!
- **Informational signage**
  - These give key information that can be easily read and saves having to answer questions.
  - For example, listing the time, a website for additional information, and date for another distribution.
Evaluation & Next Steps

Once the Distribution is complete, answer the following questions with the team to evaluate the event and introduce some possible next steps.

1. What was the most successful part of the event?

2. What was the least successful?

3. What would you do differently next time?

4. Are you interested in another Community Project Toolkit? Consider:
   - Shade Tree Distribution
   - Rain Barrel Distribution
   - Renters/Rental Property Sustainability
   - Tree ID and Mapping

5. Are you interested in setting up a community workshop? Consider:
   - Rain Water Harvesting
   - Native Plants and Turf Reduction
   - Community Tree Care Team Training
   - Citizen Forestry: Tree Planting and Care

Keep Involved!

Continue to bring sustainable solutions to your community!
Contact your TreePeople Community Education Manager or go to: sustaineablesolutions@treepeople.org.
Resources

Frequently Asked Questions

Why Should I apply mulch?
Mulch:
- Slows rainfall and direct it into the ground to water trees and plants
- Improves soil moisture and keeps the atmosphere cooler
- Decreases evaporation
- Feeds soil microorganisms that feed plants and trees
- Controls weeds
- Prevents erosion
- Makes the neighborhood healthier and more beautiful

Are all mulches created equal?
No! Good mulch comes from disease-free trees that have been chipped up. As mulch breaks down it releases nutrients into your soil. Bagged, colored wood chips use dyes that are often toxic.

Does mulch create fire?
No! Mulch is designed to help keep moisture in the landscape and hence it shouldn’t burn. Any fuel source could of course burn if it becomes dry enough but this should never happen to mulch. Additionally the shape and structure of mulch doesn’t encourage fire.

Does mulch attract termites?
As long as mulch is kept at least 6 inches away from the foundation, the more safe the structure will be.

Mulch vs Compost
Mulch is undecomposed woody material. Compost is decomposed plant material that tends to have many more nutrients available for plants than wood mulch does.

Does mulch wash away?
Mulch can wash away if not installed correctly. Consider the grade and application rate to ensure the mulch is stable.
Printable Hand-outs

The following How-to’s are available for printing out and distributing at the Mulch Distribution Event:

**In English:**
- How to Get and Apply Mulch
  http://bit.ly/1L1dqUU

**In Spanish:**
- Cómo obtener y aplicar abono

Additional resources are available here:
https://www.treepeople.org/resources