

# The Benefits of Mulch

- Mulches are a labor saving device for the gardener. A layer of mulch will help prevent the germination of many weed seeds, reducing the need for cultivation or the use of herbicides.
- Mulches also help moderate the soil temperature and retain moisture during dry weather, reducing the need for watering.
- There are many types of mulches, organic mulches such as wood chips, grass clippings, pine needles, straw, or newspaper which can help improve the soil by adding organic matter as they decompose. They also may encourage the growth of worms and other beneficial soil organisms that can help improve soil structure and the availability of nutrients for plants.

## **Some things to considerations when choosing a mulch material:**

- **What is your primary objective in using mulch?**

If you are most interested in weed control in a vegetable garden, a layer of newspaper covered with grass clippings or just straw will work well. However, if you are finishing off a beautiful perennial garden in the front of your house, you probably will want to use something more attractive such as bark mulch.

- **How long do you want the mulch to stay in place?**

If you are mulching around shrubs that will remain in place for years, you may want to use inorganic mulches such as brick chips, marble chips, or stone. While these will not provide organic matter to the soil, they will be permanent. Note that they are difficult to remove if you change your mind or want to add bulbs or perennials.

- **How much money do you want to spend?**

Mulching does not need to be expensive. Some communities offer chipped wood or compost to residents. Leaves, newspaper, and grass clippings are inexpensive mulches.

- **How much will you need?**

To be effective, most organic mulches need to be between 2 and 4 inches thick. Therefore, a 10 foot by 10 foot garden mulched 3 inches deep will require 1 cubic yard (27 cubic feet) of mulch.