



NOVEMBER 2016 TIP-OF-THE MONTH

MULCHING RE-VISITED: The MEC's very first tip-of-the month was this past April. That spring we spoke about mulching among other topics. Now, with colder weather coming, we want to talk about WINTER mulching, there are differences.

The goal of mulching during the Fall is to provide warmth and to protect the trees and shrubs from the cold and freezing temperatures of winter. Winter mulches are frequently applied heavily in autumn and then REMOVED in the spring. Trees/shrubs/plants with mulched "root zones" are often larger, healthier, have less weeds, develop faster, and have a higher rate of survival. The following are some Do's and Don'ts for winter mulching –

Three Musts of Mulching -

- 1) Turn over mulch before re-applying. While mulch does decompose, you don't want to accumulate excessive mulch. Therefore, remove some old if needed. Deep mulch will compact and result in matting. This condition won't allow the penetration of water and air.
- 2) A mulch bed should only be 2-3 inches in depth and should extend approximately 3 feet from the tree trunk area in all directions.
- 3) Mulch should NEVER touch the base of trees. Do not create a "mulch volcano". Mulch touching tree trunks can cause rotting, disease, and a home for insects, all damaging to the continued growth and health of the trees and shrubs.

Mulch material matters. Natural mulches should be a first consideration- woodchips, bark chips, ground bark, composted lawn clippings, leaves, straw and/or pine needles (*Ocean Star article, Friday, October 7, 2016*). Consider larger bark mulch for garden beds. It does not readily compact, allows for the penetration of water and air, and it breaks down more slowly resulting in less frequent mulching. An example of this is the Seaweeders' box garden beds at the Mantoloking Public Works Garage.

Homeowners can consider mulching themselves, but if using a landscape contractor, don't be shy in giving your landscaper the recommendations mentioned in this article. You can also contact Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), www.treecaretips.org, for further information.

Fall is here. If done correctly, winter mulching is healthy practice for your trees and shrubs.