

Did you know?

Tip of the Week:

Mulch Matters!

Did you know?

This watermelon is sitting on a bed of old calf bed sawdust



Applying mulch around plants is one of the simplest and most effective ways to improve soil health, conserve moisture, and support strong plant growth throughout the year.

Why this matters:

- **Soil Moisture Retention:** When the temperatures are hot, soil moisture is retained underneath mulch for longer, leaving plants less stressed and more able to concentrate on growing. Plants tend to be bigger with applied mulch.
- **Suppresses Weeds:** A thick layer of mulch, around 5 to 10 cm will reduce the incidences of weeds, reducing competition for the desired plants in your garden.
- **Temperature Regulator:** Mulch keeps roots cool in the summer and warmer in the winter.
- **Improved Soil Structure:** If organic mulch is used, it will break down over time adding organic matter to the soil. This adds carbon to soils and increases microbe activity.
- **Reduced Erosion:** Mulch protects the soil from the direct impact of topsoil to rainfall. This reduces erosion.

How to Apply it:

1. Prepare the area – remove large weeds, water the soil.
2. Choose the right mulch: bark for established gardens, or lighter mulch such as pea straw or well-rotted compost for vegetable gardens
3. Avoid grass clippings as they tend to form a mat, or fresh sawdust as it ties up Nitrogen.
4. Apply the mulch approximately 5-10 cm thick, keep a gap around the trunk or stem to avoid rotting the stem.
5. Re-apply every year in spring when the soil is damp.

Resources:

Massey University research: Akhtar, K., Arif, M. (Agronomist), Riaz, M. P. D., & Wang, H. (2022). *Mulching in agroecosystems : plants, soil & environment* / Kashif Akhtar, Muhammad Arif, Muhammad Riaz, Haiyan Wang, editors. Springer.

[Mulching 101: Why Mulch Matters | Chelsea Green Publishing](#)

Want to find out more? At Massey we have two degrees where you can learn more about mulch: [The Bachelor of Horticultural and Plant Systems degree](#) and the [Bachelor of Earth and Environmental Science](#). Email Bronwyn Dyer: b.dyer1@massey.ac.nz for more information.

Some careers using this knowledge: Ecologist, Council Environmental advisor, Landscaper, Gardener, Grower, DOC ranger

Do Now questions: How does mulch help plants to grow better? How does mulch help with sustainability? Write down one thing you should not do with mulch.