

MULCH EXHIBIT



The Beauty of Mulch! Mulch is used to make your landscape more sustainable. Although many see it as a landscape “design feature”, it is more importantly a strategy for better plant health and water management. Think of mulch as insulation. It covers bare soil minimizing water evaporation and decreasing soil surface temperatures—major water savers! But mulch is much more. It suppresses weeds, improves soil health, and can give your garden a nice, neat, finished look. It is one of the best things you can do for your garden because it improves the look without harming the soil health. The two categories of mulch are organic (wood shavings, bark, straw, hulls, etc.) and inorganic (stone, gravel, sand, etc.). The biggest consideration is the health of the soil. If you want to continue to improve the soil, then organic mulching is the answer. Think about the look you are trying to achieve to help you determine the best material, and the right size and color. There are many options available and you can see nine examples of them in The Garden’s **Mulch Exhibit**—four inorganic and five organic selections. Of course, there are many more available, but this will get you started asking the right questions. If you plan to use multiple selections, remember mulch can become displaced, so, plan on some type of edging between different materials.

INORGANIC MATERIALS (as viewed from left to right)



BLACK RIVER ROCK (Medium size)

River rocks can be used for the look of a dry river bed, border gardens, geometric designs, and even a planting foundation. For those plants that can’t tolerate wet soil around their roots, like succulents and cacti, river rocks are perfect. They drain quickly and retain heat for plants that thrive on it. Of course that means they are not suitable as a planter for more delicate plants. River rocks also come in a variety of sizes and colors, so you can achieve many different looks.

INORGANIC MATERIALS (continued)



PEA GRAVEL

Pea gravel is similar to river rock. It is mostly smooth, but is much smaller—typically less than an inch in diameter. Don't confuse crushed stone for Pea Gravel. Crushed stone is produced by a mechanical system of crushing the stones, leaving rough edges. Pea Gravel is water-worn and much smoother and less abrasive when handling it. Pea Gravel comes in many colors and can be used as a pathway, border color, or transition between two other materials. Not suitable for planting, does provide a stable surface.



CORAL DECOMPOSED GRANITE

Decomposed Granite, or "DG", is prevalent throughout California. In fact, many homes in San Diego County sit on DG. Certain plants, like succulents, cacti and palms do well in DG since it drains easily. But DG is mostly known for pathways and large areas as a stable surface to walk, run and play on. When stabilized it retains its shape and hardens so that it can withstand heavy use, but remains permeable, so water still filters through and reduces runoff. It also comes in many colors and is relatively inexpensive.



GRAVEL

Lower maintenance lawns have become quite popular and many homeowners have opted to use gravel to fill areas of their garden. Gravel in a yard reduces watering, weeding and workload for homeowners. Once installed, it maintains its color and stays in place. It's perfect for border gardens and designs and shapes. It's also a good underlayment for raised gardens, since it restricts weed growth. However, it's not the best surface for kids or pets since the edges can be sharp and it is more expensive than DG.

ORGANIC MATERIALS (as viewed from left to right)



SHREDDED REDWOOD

Shredded redwood has a natural appearance and can make flower beds look, *and smell*, great. The pleasant redwood scent is a nice addition to any garden. Redwood mulch also has natural insect-repelling and rot-resisting qualities and last longer than other wood mulches. However, smell before you buy! If it smells bad, buy something else or spread it out to air out. Once the smell is gone it's good. Organic materials break down over time, so plan to replace redwood every three to four years.



NUGGET BARK

Nugget bark is very easy to install. Because of its small size and it's availability it's an easy way to dress up any yard. Bark products, especially mini-nuggets, should not be used in flower beds that tend to flood or retain water during heavy rains. Bark is lighter than water, so it can float away, leaving you with the task of chasing after your mulch. However, bark is long lasting, and when it breaks down it actually enriches the soil. It can be used for paths, but has an uneven surface so it's better for beds and borders.



COLOR ENHANCED MULCH

Most wood used for color enhanced mulch is recycled. So, if you are a fan of re-purposing and recycling, this is a good choice. Recycled wood is used because it has dried out and will absorb colors much easier than freshly cut wood. There are many color options with this product, so you can achieve just about any look you want with it. Because it is wood, it will eventually breakdown, but typically lasts for several years and has been known to hold color well for at least three to five years. A good choice for pathways and borders.

ORGANIC MATERIALS (continued)



NURSERY BULK MULCH

Mulch is typically bought in bags, ranging in size and cost. Although easier to handle, mulch is more expensive when packaged. If you have enough yard to use several bags, consider buying in bulk. Good suppliers can deliver it to your house, and sell a safe, quality product. Plan ahead for how much you need and where to store it until installed. TIP: Delivery prices can eat up your savings, so shop around. Find a good supplier with a reasonable delivery cost, and bulk mulch is a low cost, eco-friendly solution.



PATHWAY BARK

Pathway bark is specifically sized for a smooth walking surface. The chunks are not as irregular in size and shape as bark nuggets or other mulches with larger-sized pieces. Because bark breaks down slower than other wood products, pathway bark will not require frequent replacement. Products with the word “bark” in the name are required to be at least 70% bark from the tree it is named for. That means pathway bark is available in several color and scent options, so choose one that’s best for you.