

# 6 Best Practices For Mulching The Right Way



Source: [www.TurfMagazine.com](http://www.TurfMagazine.com)

Fall is a popular time to freshen up clients' landscape beds with mulch. This profitable add-on service has best practices that landscape contractors should follow to get the best results and keep their clients' plants healthy and protected. "Think of mulch as a temporary forest floor," [says Susan Day](#), a professor in the department of horticulture and forest services/environmental conservation at Virginia Tech, and the Soil Science Society of America. Here are some mulching methods your crew should implement. We have covered mulching practices numerous times on *Turf*, so we went through the archives to share six mulching best practices.

## **1. Apply the correct amount**

"When applying mulch, 1 to 3 inches is recommended," says [Kyle Daniel, Purdue University](#), commercial nursery and landscape specialist. "Three inches is optimal for most of the benefits to be realized." For new areas, 2 to 4 inches is good, but reduce that amount to 1 to 2 inches around perennials and just 1 inch around annuals. Established beds simply need a touch-up for appearances.

## **2. Avoid mulch volcanoes**

It's important not to place mulch up to the bark of plants and trees creating a volcano appearance. Bark decay occurs when mulch is left against tree trunks or stems of shrubs for extended periods of time. The mulch causes continuous dampness that will encourage decay, attract insects, fungi and bacteria to feed on the rotting wood. Wood rot can develop and cause the eventual death of woody plants.

### **3. Don't overdo it**

"Over-mulching is the most common mistake landscapers make," [says Rebecca Finneran, Michigan State University Extension](#). Lawn care pros should watch out for mulch build-up and discard or turn over excess amounts of old mulch. Rodents can nest in excessive mulch, and when roots grow into thick mulch, they are prone to water stress during dry periods and cold injury during freezing temperatures.

### **4. Add an herbicide**

"If applying mulch in the spring or fall, an application of preemergence herbicide is recommended to aide in reducing winter- annual and summer-annual weeds, respectively," according to [Kyle Daniel, from Purdue University](#). This may also save time for your crews in the future when it comes time to weed and clean up the landscape beds.

### **5. Use a two-crew system**

Tommy Randall, president of Randall Landscaping, Salem, New Hampshire, [uses a two-step operation](#). The cleanup crew is first, removing dead plants, twigs, old leaves and other debris from all of the landscape beds. Then the mulch installation crew follows second.

### **6. Price correctly**

Measuring the landscape beds carefully is one of the most important steps to making an acceptable profit margin while also keeping the clients happy with accurate pricing. Over- or under-estimating the cost of the mulch will mean an incorrect amount of materials, which will eat into profits or increase the client's cost. Be sure to take existing plants and trees into consideration for amount of mulch and the time it will take to work around the plants carefully.

**Read more:**

- [Mulch Selection and Installation](#)
- [Mulch Service Solutions](#)
- [It's Time for Fall Mulching](#)
- [How to Make Mulching Work For You](#)