



FBMG Help Desk
Question of the Week

I was told that my black mulch is bad and should be dug out and replaced with cedar mulch.

Is this accurate?

Well...

Red and Black Dyed Mulches

Although the dyes are not considered toxic to plants, the mulch often contains wood from construction and demolition (C&D) sites as well as old pallets

Red Mulch is dyed with an iron oxide derivative and black mulch is dyed with a carbon-based derivative material similar to what is used in some inks and cosmetics. As a result of the dye itself with time the black may fade more than the red.

While reusing sounds wonderful and the pros from the recycling point of view are the lower cost, & better color saturation on older and drier wood than fresh, there is a drawback to this repurposing as it is almost impossible to determine the source and the age of the wood from the C&D sites and used pallets.

The age is important as prior to 2003 much the lumber industry treated with Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA) especially if the lumber would be used outside. This on it use went into effect on 01/01/2003.



Cedar as a Mulch?

Fragrant and Attractive

It has the same properties in the garden as in a closet or cedar chest.



Pros

- *Naturally repels insects*
- *Takes longer to breakdown*
- *Has a pleasing scent*
- *Contains Thujaplicin*
 - *chemical element that has Anti-fungal, Antibacterial, Antioxidant properties*



Cons

- *Expensive*
- *Repels the good insects with the bad*
- *Longer to add nutrients to the soil due to slow decomposition*
- *Some may be allergic to the scent or the oils*



Mulch Comes in Many Forms

Organic and Inorganic

Mulch comes in a variety of forms; pinestraw, leaves, straw, shredded bark, compost, rocks, shredded tires, or groundcovers the possibilities while not endless, seem so.

- shredded leaves can decompose quickly and help add nutrients to the soil faster, they need to be replaced often
- rocks don't need replacing, don't add nutrients to the soils, do seem to reduce pests are best used on walkways or under downspouts as they can produce too much heat for some plants
- shredded barks and wood chips decompose fairly quickly and add nutrients to the soil
- pinestraw is relatively inexpensive and decompose quickly
- dwarf mondo grass is a living cover



The Benefits of Mulch

A needed addition to the garden and created naturally in nature.

Take a stroll through the forest and you will see a naturally occurring layer of mulch on the forest floor!



Mulch covers the soil and helps it to keep from drying out thus allowing it to absorb water more efficiently and it helps keep the soil in place thus reducing erosion. Natural mulch will decompose overtime adding nutrients to the soil. It block sunlight from the soil and reduces germination of weed seeds.

Mulch is a temperature regulator cooling the soil in the summer and warming it in the winter.



Mulch aids in the production of your garden. Vegetable gardens that are mulched have shown to produced almost 50% more produce than unmulched gardens. Plants absorb nutrients more efficiently. Mulch helps to prevent disease and fruit rot by reducing splash from the ground during rain and irrigation. Maintenance is reduced by less work pulling weeds.

Ideally approximately 4" of mulch around the plants but not on the plants themselves.

A Little Goes a Long Way

Sometimes Less is More

Mulch can be easily overdone and go from benefiting to harming the garden.

Save a tree, reduce the urge to create mulch volcanos!



mulch volcano (bad)



proper mulch (good)

To properly mulch around a tree

- use a thin layer of mulch 2-3 "
- use an organic mulch
- avoid using plastic under the mulch as it reduces the ability to absorb water
- smooth the mulch around the tree in an even layer that extends to the dripline of your tree

Do not pile up the mulch against the trunk

- this can contribute to disease, pests and eventually if unchecked tree death
- this causes improper root growth

Protect your trees! Protect your garden! Do not over mulch!

The Reward is Worth the Effort

Endless Possibilities



A great way to recycle what you already have!



You can:

- *use the fallen leaves in the fall*
- *ask your neighbors for theirs*
- *spread the compost from your bin*
- *turn over the compost that is already in the garden*
- *top dress with just a little bit more*

Your reward:

- *a healthier garden and yard*
- *reduced irrigation cost*
- *an attractive garden*
- *enjoying nature*
- *less time pulling weeds*



*Do you have questions
about your home
landscape and plants?*

*Contact the Fort Bend
Master Gardener Help Desk:*

Email:

FortBendmg@ag.tamu.edu

Phone:

281-341-7068

*The Help Desk is manned
Monday thru Friday,
9am-Noon*

*https://www.atsdr.edc.gov/CCA-Treated_Wood_Factsheet.pdf
[Mulch - A Survey of Available Options \(psu.edu\)](#)
[Cedar Mulch Pros And Cons: Should It Go In Your Garden?](#)
[\(seedsandspades.com\)](#)*

[Garden Mulches \[fact sheet\] | Extension \(unh.edu\)](#)

*[1. Colored Bark Mulch. University of Massachusetts Extension
Landscape: Colored Bark Mulch | Center for Agriculture, Food, and
the Environment at UMass AmherstUMass Extension Landscape,
Nursery and Urban Forestry Program](#)*

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/403/2015/03/alleopathic-wood-chips.pdf>

*[Is Dyed Mulch Safe to Use? Here's One Type OK to Handle](#)
[\(thespruce.com\)](#)*

*[h UMass Extension Landscape, Nursery and Urban Forestry,
Program](#)*

[Microsoft Word - B&B #34 - alleopathic wood chips.doc \(wsu.edu\)](#)

<http://tjfsweb.tamu.edu> [how do I care for my tree mulching your tree](#)

[Easy gardening mulching texas A&M agrilife extension](#)

[Easy Gardening: Mulching.\(agrilife.org\) \[How to manage garden\]\(#\)](#)

[weeds with mulch - AgriLife Today.\(tamu.edu\) \[How\]\(#\)](#)

[Texas Urban Landscape Guide \(tamu.edu\)](#)

[Mulches for Water Conservation \(tamu.edu\)](#)

*[How Much Compost, Soil or Mulch? - Urban Programs Travis
County \(tamu.edu\)](#)*

[Mulch | Home & Garden Information Center \(clemson.edu\)](#)

*[Choosing and Installing Mulches - Gardening Solutions - University
of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(ufl.edu\)](#)*

*[Mulching Your Vegetable Garden - Gardening Solutions - University
of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(ufl.edu\)](#)*

[Mulch - A Survey of Available Options \(psu.edu\)](#)