

mulch materials

Mulches are a layer of organic material placed around plants to inhibit weed growth, minimize soil erosion and runoff, reduce watering needs by keeping soils moist, and define areas. Several of the same materials useful for paths (such as wood chips and nutshells) make good mulches, as well. While mulch is a landscape material, and therefore included in this guide, it's as important to use mulch correctly as it is to identify the type you'll use. The type of plants you're mulching determine the best material for the job. For tips on when, where, how, and how much to mulch, refer to the *Growing Healthy Soil* guide; see *Resources* on page 20 for details.



mulch choices

MATERIAL	DESCRIPTION/TIPS	BENEFITS	DRAWBACKS
Compost 	<p>Yard waste and other organic materials decompose to create a dark, crumbly, earthy material. After used as mulch, compost can be worked into the soil to feed and enhance plants and soil life.</p> <p>Tips: Make your own compost at home (see <i>Resources</i> on page XX), or purchase from local suppliers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recycled content improve soil quality can be produced on site, or ordered from local suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeds germinate more readily than in finer textured mulches
Leaves 	<p>Fall leaves make excellent mulch, decomposing quickly; a free annual supply is guaranteed.</p> <p>Tips: Shred leaves with a mower, or use them whole. Evergreen leaves take longer to decompose; some leaves, such as Rhododendron, are poisonous.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve soil quality free reduce winter soil erosion insulate plant roots from cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> if left whole, may blow around
Wood Chips 	<p>See description and tips in <i>Patio, walkway & path choices</i> on page 8. Do not use chips you suspect came from chemically treated lumber or diseased trees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> natural look low cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> may spread weeds and disease
Nutshells 	<p>See description and tips in <i>Patio, walkway & path choices</i> on page 8.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> natural look low cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hard on bare feet

Compost: More Than Just Mulch

Adding compost when preparing garden, lawn, or plant bed soil encourages healthy plant growth while reducing your landscape's water, fertilizer and pesticide needs. The general rule is to incorporate between one and three inches of compost into the upper eight inches of soil. For information on soil testing, solving soil problems, or finding a compost supplier, see the *Growing Healthy Soil* guide at www.seattle.gov/util (click on *Yard*, then *Natural Lawn & Garden Care*) or call the Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline at (206) 633-0224.