

The Magic of Mulch

When there is a drought it is a reminder of the importance of water conservation in the garden. Finishing off every planting project with a layer of organic mulch is the best investment you can make towards the future drought tolerance of your garden. A blanket of slowly decaying organic matter both protects the soil from weather extremes and sustains a rich dark topsoil. Easy weed control is an added benefit.

Apart from all those practical benefits, standing back and admiring your beautiful freshly mulched garden is a truly satisfying end to a mornings work. Organic mulches, such as pine bark, pine needles, leaves, wood chip, paper, straw, compost and sawdust need to be replenished, usually about once a year, until trees and shrubs are well established. Living Earth mulch and compost products are 100% weed free.

Thick layers of newspaper laid under organic mulch makes a cheap and very effective weed barrier in the early stages of a new garden, eventually rotting down. Newspapers can be butted up to the plants quite closely. Lay it at least eight pages thick and wet it as you go.

Decorative inorganic materials, such as pebble and gravel do not contribute to the organic matter in the soil but they will prevent water loss while lasting longer between top ups. Woven and non woven weed mat (the porous kind) is an effective weed barrier, well worth laying under pebble pathways or other areas.

How to lay mulch

It's generally best to lay mulch after, rather than before planting to avoid mixing soil with mulch.

1. Clear or spray any weeds. It is important to completely eradicate all trace of perennial weeds before laying mulch. You may need to spray more than once.
2. Apply slow release fertiliser, blood and bone or sheep pellets.
3. Water thoroughly.
4. (Optional) Lay newspaper (at least 12 sheets thick) around plants, as an extra weed barrier. Wet thoroughly.
5. Use wheelbarrow, shovel and rake (or gloved hands) to spread mulch to an even depth of 5 - 8cm, taking care not to pile it up around tree trunks and pulling it back slightly from plant stems. Thoroughly cover the area to an even depth. Thin patches invite weeds.