

City of Newburgh

Press Release

83 Broadway, Newburgh, N.Y. 12550
(845) 569-7354 – (845) 569-7370

for immediate release

May 10, 2010

Information on Tree Care and Proper Mulching Techniques Offered by City of Newburgh Shade Tree Commission

Now that spring is upon us, it is time to pay renewed attention to yards and plantings. Trees have taken a toll recently with monumental ‘nature pruning’. Large limbs have fallen due to heavy wet snow and have caused bark stripping and open jagged wounds to branch stumps on the trees. It is important to prune these limb stumps to the collar, close to the trunk, to discourage pests from burrowing in and causing more damage.

Along with spring pruning and general clean-up of our trees, it is time to think about applying and/or refurbishing mulch over the soil surface of yard trees, to maintain moisture and improve soil conditions. Mulching is one of the most beneficial things a home owner can do for the health of their trees. Mulch can reduce water loss from the soil, minimize weed competition and improve soil structure. Properly applied, mulch can give landscapes a handsome, well-groomed appearance.

Mulches are available commercially in many forms. Inorganic mulches include various types of stone, lava rock, pulverized rubber, etc. Inorganic mulches do not decompose and do not need to be replenished often. On the other hand, they do not improve soil structure, add organic materials, or provide nutrients. For these reasons, most horticulturists and arborists prefer organic mulches such as: wood chips, pine needles, hardwood and softwood bark, leaves, compost mixtures, etc.

As is seen in the natural forests, trees have their roots anchored in a rich, well-aerated soil full of essential nutrients. The soil is blanketed by leaves and organic materials that serve to replenish nutrients and provide an optimal environment for root growth and mineral uptake. Urban landscapes, however, are typically a much harsher environment with poor soils, little organic matter, and large fluctuations in temperature and moisture. So applying mulch can mimic a more natural environment and improve plant health.

As beneficial as mulch is, too much can be harmful. The generally recommended depth is 2-4 inches. Unfortunately, many landscapes are falling victim to a plague of overmulching. A new term, “mulch volcanoes” has emerged to describe mulch that has been piled up around the base of trees. It is important to avoid placing layers in excess of 4 inches because greater depths can be unhealthy. Deep mulch problems can lead to excess moisture in the root zone, which can stress the plant and cause root rot. Piling mulch against the trunk or stems of plants can stress stem tissues and may lead to insect and disease problems. Mulch piled high against the trunks of trees may create habitats for rodents that chew the bark and can girdle the trees. Thick blankets of fine mulch can become matted and may prevent the penetration of water and air. You can rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and to refresh the appearance. If the mulch is piled against the stems or tree trunks, pull it back several inches so that the base of the trunk and the root crown are exposed. These are things to consider when applying mulch so we don’t end up causing a situation that can ultimately threaten the health of our trees.

In addition, mulch should ideally extend to the ‘drip-line’ of the tree, which is the outermost area that the limbs reach. Again, applying a small pile of mulch at the base of the tree does not adequately protect and give nutrients to the root system that grows way beyond the trunk. If the tree had a say in the matter, its entire root system (which usually extends well beyond the drip line) would be mulched, as it is in the forest. Spread that mulch out as much as possible around your trees. This also gives a nice appearance to the tree setting.

For more information, please email: shadetree@cityofnewburgh-ny.gov or call (845) 569-7366. Leave a message and your call will be returned.



Proper mulching technique



'Mulch volcanoes' cause many problems for trees