



## **Mulch.....**

Either you love it or you hate it, but like death and taxes, it's inevitable if you are to garden successfully in the Lowcountry.

Generally, our soil is very poor; sandy and lacking tilth (the ability to support plant life). The addition of organic amendments is a life-long commitment. Organic mulches, such as wood chips, bark, pine straw, shredded leaves, grass clippings, and even Spanish Moss, will have to be replaced regularly.

So where does it go? The decomposing mulch adds the tilth and nourishment to the soil, which is used by plants to make food. It's nature's wonderful natural circle. Mulch is made from dead plant material, which is used by living plants. Living plants, in their turn, when they die, are used by another generation.

The type of mulch you use is determined by a number of factors: personal choice, availability, cost and where it will be used.

Wood chips, bark, shredded leaves and grass clippings are best used in flower beds in which you will be planting, transplanting and replacing plant material. It is easy to dig through and easy to spread and replace.

Pine straw, Spanish Moss and Coastal Bermuda Hay are good for foundation plantings which won't be disturbed. Pine straw is slower to decompose than hay and they both must be distributed by hand; not by raking. Spanish Moss on the ground is soon invaded by small biting insects, so once put down, don't work in it.

Using too much or too little is a waste of time and money. It must be deep enough to do its job; suppress weeds, moderate the soil, and prevent water splash up onto plants, but must not be too deep to allow water, oxygen and nourishment to reach the roots of the plants.

Generally speaking, light mulches such as large wood chips and bark, pine straw and hay should be from three to four inches deep. Dense mulches such as grass clippings, shredded leaves and double or triple ground mulch should be no more than two inches deep.

We don't recommend the use of the mulches made from plastic or rubber from ground tires for home garden or foundation use. It's best left to commercial growers.

So where does this leave us? With yet another garden chore which much be performed regularly. But look at it this way: it's a gift to your landscape and the single most environmentally beneficial thing you can do in your garden.

