

## Proper Mulching Key to Healthy Trees

By Bartlett Tree Company

When applied properly, mulch is one of the most beneficial things a homeowner can do to keep trees healthy. It helps maintain soil moisture, controls weeds, and improves soil structure by contributing organic matter. But over mulching can be one of the worst landscaping mistakes you can make, causing significant damage to trees and other plants. Most of the fine absorbing roots of trees are located within inches of the soil surface. These shallow roots are essential for taking up water and minerals for trees, and they require oxygen to survive. In addition to depriving the roots of oxygen, over mulching can cause excess moisture in the root zone, insect and disease problem, micro-nutrient deficiency, anaerobic bed conditions, and habitat for rodents that chew bark and girdle trees.

Follow these mulching tips to protect your tree's health:

- For a well-drained site, apply a 2-to 4-inch layer of mulch. If drainage problems persist, use a thinner layer.
- Check the depth of existing mulch. Do not add mulch if there is already sufficient mulch (2 to 3 inches). Instead, rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and refresh the appearance.
- Do not place mulch against tree trunks.
- If mulch is already piled against tree trunks or stems, pull it back several inches so that the base of the trunk and root crown are exposed.

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Volcano mulching suffocates surface roots of trees.



Proper mulching can help keep a tree healthy.  
(Sarah Cox, Purdue University)

## Protect Mature Trees – Stop the Topping!

Trees, our greatest natural defense against stormwater runoff, depend on full crowns and a mature height to be healthy and strong. Interior pruning is appropriate, but the common practice of tree topping, which reduces the height of a tree's crown, should be avoided whenever possible. Topping is cutting back to stubs or lateral branches not large enough to sustain the remaining branch. Trees need full height and strong branches and crowns to resist wind and disease and to do their job keeping our air cleaner and reducing stormwater runoff. Mature trees can intercept at least 3,000 gallons of water a year. Tree topping weakens the tree and increases the need for pruning over the years.

For more information on why to avoid topping trees, and alternatives to topping, please visit the International Society for Arboriculture's website at <http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/resources/WhyToppingHurts.pdf>.

