

## GARDENING



# MULCH: SPREADING GARDEN GOODNESS

*With winter finally upon us, now is a great time to get stuck into your garden and nurture soil moisture and nutrients during the cool weather. Here is some key advice for getting the most out of mulching your garden.*

**F**ROM helping to retain moisture in the soil to working to suppress weeds, mulching a garden has a variety of valuable benefits

Weeding Women horticulturist Cathy Forbes says mulch can be applied at any time of year and an annual top-up is advisable for keeping your garden in tip-top shape.

“Organic mulches will break down quickly, improving soil structure, and chunky mulch is preferable to very fine mulch,” she says. “Very fine mulches should be avoided as they can become compacted and prevent the water from reaching the plants roots.”

In a climate like Perth’s, keeping water use to a minimum is paramount and mulching the garden helps to prevent water evaporation.

Mulching has the advantage of reducing competition from weeds for water, meaning less water is being wasted keeping the weeds alive.

Although mulching helps to suppress weeds, Cathy says you still need to weed the area thoroughly before mulching, otherwise weeds will start popping up through the mulch.

Another great preparation technique is to apply manure or compost and a wetting agent before applying a good layer of mulch.

“As the micro-organisms start to break down

in the mulch they need nitrogen and will draw this out of the soil,” she says.

“This is called nitrogen drawdown; adding a good manure at the time of mulching will help reduce the competition for nitrogen between the plant roots and the micro-organisms.”

Naturally, different areas of the garden will respond better to different types of mulch.

Cathy says using both organic and non-organic mulches in the garden, such as a decorative bed of pebbles or river stones around a water feature, may be more suitable than simply a layer of organic mulch.

Lupin mulch or pea straw would also be more suited to the veggie patch than pine bark mulch, so it is advisable to research which mulch will work best for the area of the garden you are working in.

Mulch can be a great addition to any garden when done correctly, but there are some pitfalls you and your garden need to look out for.

Cathy says it is important not to spread mulch too thinly or too thickly as both of these methods can prove ineffective.

The chunkier the mulch, the thicker it can be applied, with a depth of 5-10cm being preferred and 7cm being perfect.

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