

IMPRESSIONS

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The Importance of Proper Mulching By: John Murphy, ISA Certified Arborist

One of the clear indicators of spring in New England is the fresh smell of mulch as it is installed on campus or in your neighborhood.

Improper mulching is becoming a significant problem for many trees and plants. Therefore, we are providing information from a great fact sheet that is provided by the International Society of Arboricultural (ISA). ISA is a non-profit organization supporting tree care research around the world and dedicated to the care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees.

PROPER MULCHING TECHNIQUES

Mulches are materials placed over the soil surface to maintain moisture and improve soil conditions. Mulching is one of the most beneficial things you can do for the health of a tree. 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. Mulch must be applied properly; if it is too deep or if the wrong material is used, it can actually cause significant harm to trees and other landscape plants.



Benefits of Mulching

- Helps maintain soil moisture. Evaporation is reduced, and the need for watering can be minimized.

- Helps control weeds. A 2 to 4 inch layer of mulch can reduce the germination and growth of weeds.
- Mulch serves as nature's insulating blanket. Mulch keeps soils warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer.
- Many types of mulch can improve soil aeration, structure (aggregation of soil particles) and drainage over time.
- Mulching around trees helps facilitate maintenance and can reduce the likelihood of physical damage from mowing and trimming equipment.
- Mulch can give planting beds a uniform, well-cared-for look.

Types of Mulch

Mulches are available commercially in many forms. The two major types of mulch are inorganic and organic.

Inorganic Mulches (stone, lava rock, pulverized rubber, geotextile fabrics, and other materials) do not decompose and do not need to be replenished often. However, they do not improve soil structure, add organic materials, or provide nutrients. For these reasons, most horticulturists and arborists prefer organic mulches.

Organic mulches (wood chips, pine needles, hardwood and softwood bark, cocoa hulls, leaves, and compost mixes), are derived from plants. Organic mulches decompose in the landscape at different rates depending on the material and climate. Those that decompose faster must be replenished more often. Because the decomposition process improves soil quality and fertility, many arborists and other landscape professionals consider that characteristic a positive one, despite the added maintenance.

Problems Associated with Improper Mulching

- Deep mulch 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. These "mulch volcanoes" cause many problems for trees.
- Some mulches, especially those containing grass clippings, can affect soil pH. Continued use of certain mulches over long periods can lead to micronutrient deficiencies or toxicities.
- Mulch piled high against the trunks of young 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. In addition, a thick layer of fine mulch can become like potting soil and may support weed growth.
- Anaerobic "sour" mulch may give off pungent odors, and the alcohols and organic acids that build up may be toxic to young plants.

Proper Mulching

It is clear that the choice of mulch and the method of application can be important to the health of landscape plants. The following are some guidelines to use when applying mulch.

- Inspect plants and soil in the area to be mulched. Determine whether drainage is adequate. Determine whether there are plants that may be affected by the choice of mulch. Most commonly available mulches work well in most landscapes. Some plants may benefit from the use of a slightly acidifying mulch such as pine bark.
- If mulch is already present, check the depth. Do not add mulch if there is a sufficient layer in place. Rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and to refresh the appearance.
- If 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.

- Organic mulches usually are preferred to inorganic materials due to their soil-enhancing properties. If organic mulch is used, it should be well aerated and, preferably, composted. Avoid sour-smelling mulch.
- Composted wood chips can make good mulch, especially when they contain a blend of leaves, bark, and wood. Fresh wood chips also may be used around established trees and shrubs. Avoid using non-composted wood chips that have been piled deeply without exposure to oxygen.
- For well-drained sites, aim for a total depth of a 2 to 4 inch layer of mulch. If there are drainage problems, a thinner layer should be used. Avoid placing mulch against the tree trunks. Place mulch out to the tree's drip line or beyond.



We can help

Our team is equipped with several unique tools to assist with mulch installation. Our team provides and installs thousands of cubic yards of bark mulch during the months of April, May and June. In addition, we can assist with the proper remedial actions and techniques to correct over mulching.

If you would like to discuss options for our team assisting your team with the installation of mulch, please contact us at sales@CampusCare.com.

Seasonal Tips: **When Soil Tests are Necessary**

Soil testing can provide a wealth of information regarding what is going on below the lawn areas on your campus and the sports turf on your fields. Therefore it is important to plan soil testing into your annual planning and assessments. Soil testing helps to document existing conditions in your soils. In addition, it also allows you to measure or assess the impact of treatments and cultural practices that you are implementing into your annual program.



When constructing a new field, it is imperative to conduct a soil test. It is crucial to complete this test prior to beginning the project to determine the soil makeup that will support the field. The soil analysis will provide information regarding the quality of the topsoil, drainage characteristics of the area, compaction, and whether the site has been disturbed. By gaining this information, you will then be aware of what treatments and actions will be necessary to better prepare the soil and ensure that it will enable your new field to thrive.

If you are considering undertaking a field renovation project, you should also consider performing soil analysis testing. You should look into tests to determine the nutrient

composition of your field. It is also advisable to analyze the rootzone through a soil textural analysis and an organic matter test. This information will help you determine how to continue to maintain your field.

If you are experiencing issues with a particular field or lawn area, it would be a logical solution to perform soil testing to determine where your issues lie and how to best go about correcting them. It is recommended to perform a tissue test to understand how well your fertility program is working. A soil diagnosis test can also be beneficial in uncovering what your soil problems are and how you can fix them.

Soil testing is a reliable method to both correct existing field problems and to ensure that new field construction/renovation efforts are not futile. Understanding what is going on below the turf is the only way to ensure a superior playing field and exceptional turf on your property.

Working Smarter Update **Update from our Lean Management Journey**

CampusCare® has made a commitment to working smarter by implementing lean management throughout our organization. CampusCare® strongly believes that Lean Management practices can help schools succeed. Therefore, we intend to provide a monthly update from our lean journey in the hope that you may be able to apply some of our lessons learned to your organization.

Lean management encourages increased efficiency through the elimination of waste. The focus is solely on what the organization does to provide value to its clients or end users (a.k.a. students) of a product or service.

Here is our update since the last issue of *Impressions*:

WSTC - Challenge #2

We have begun Challenge #2 of the Working Smarter Training Challenge Year 3 program by sending a team of five to the gemba. Gemba is a lean term that comes from the Japanese word meaning "the real place." In essence, it means to go to the place of work and observe. The goal of this day was to challenge our Mulch Mule production rates from last year. This innovative piece of equipment was purchased last year as a result of a Kaizen Event that we completed on mulching techniques. We wanted to ensure that the production rates it produced were creating enough value.



We were fortunate enough to have the National Sales Manger for Mulch Mule, Lloyd Shankel, on hand to observe and train. We learned a great deal that day and we are happy to say that

we were able to replicate the results needed and were able to create "Standard Work" documents for our training on the proper operation and use of this tool.

SMART COMPANIES - Face-To-Face Tour

Our company was selected to be one of four companies from the United States to be featured in the SMART Companies Face to Face Tour that is occurring in 2009. On June 16th, companies from all around the United States and Canada will be visiting our company for one day as part of this special event organized by J. P. Horizons. The event will then be offered in Colorado, Ohio and Illinois in July, August and September.

Our team is energized, honored and even a little nervous about this upcoming event! It is great to be recognized as a leader in our industry and be chosen as the first company for this event. However, we are really MOST EXCITED about learning from our guests so we can improve even further!



The agenda for the day includes:

- Property tour with some of the Best in the Green Industry
- Exposure to real solutions in sales, productivity, keeping score, systems, and fleet management
- Peer networking and better practice sharing
- Hands-on interactive learning opportunities that will help all of us take what you see and hear back to our individual companies and teams.

We look forward to sharing what we learned from our day in future issues in the hope that you may be able to implement some of the best practices that are created by the group.

Project Profile

Joe Morgan Little League Field, Walpole, MA

The town of Walpole hired CampusCare® to renovate the Joe Morgan Little League Field in the fall of 2007.

The field suffered from poor drainage, holes, an uneven infield, and was in need of measurable repairs. In the spring and summer months, the field is used day and night for practice and games by little league baseball, tee ball, and softball teams. The wear from this extensive usage was beginning to show. Though repairs were clearly needed, the town wanted to ensure that the renovation was completed cost efficiently for their budget. CampusCare® was able to work with the town to provide an acceptable solution at a reasonable price for the town's budget.



Using laser graders and other specialized equipment, CampusCare® made improvements to the both the safety and playability of the field. The scope of work for this field included:

- Documenting existing conditions by measuring existing grades and elevations
- Meeting with the Parks Department to determine desired results
- Developing a plan that outlined various options to



achieve the desired results

- Removal of the existing grass infield and the immediate perimeter of the skinned infield surface
- Reconstruction of the pitcher's mound to specifications
- Add soil and regrade the infield and perimeter for proper elevation and improved drainage
- Add clay infield mix and laser grade to exact elevations for proper play and drainage
- Install partial sod in the infield to protect clay material during grow in
- Seed and fertilize to establish new turf
- Application of hydro-mulch



The improvement and impact of the results have been extremely positive thus far. Undoubtedly, this is an investment the youth athletes of Walpole will enjoy and use extensively.

Could this be you?

- **FRUSTRATED** with not having a **COST EFFECTIVE** solution to **ASSIST** your in-house crews with specialized tasks?
- **WORRIED** that prospective students or parents may find **OTHER SCHOOLS** more inviting?
- **CONCERNED** about **UNLIMITED** needs but have **LIMITED** budgets?

We can help!

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