



THE MAGIC OF MULCH

Organic mulch is the most important ingredient at MBBG and in most healthy gardens. What exactly is mulch, you might ask? What's the difference between it and compost? What does mulch do, why is it good, and where does one get it? Here's a bit of mulch minutia to munch on.

Mulch is a loose material that is **SPREAD ON TOP** of the soil and can be laid evenly all over the garden. Stay at least 2"- 4" from plant trunks and at least 6"-12" from trees to prevent crown rot. Organic mulch is made up of raw materials like leaves, wood or bark chips, nutshells, pine needles, straw and/or roots. Here are some wonderful things it does when applied properly in a thick layer of 4" or even 6" if very dry (it compresses when watered):

1. Prevents top soil from washing away during rains or watering
2. Helps maintain the temperature of soil, keeping it warmer in winter and cooler in summer
3. Slows evaporation of water from soil (great in our hot dry climate)
4. Shuts out sunlight, impeding weed growth
5. Supplies nutrients to soil as it decomposes
6. Improves overall look of garden.

Organic mulch is fairly lightweight and can be light to dark in color.

Compost, on the other hand, is material that is partly or completely decayed already. Typically it is **MIXED INTO** the soil, however sometimes it is laid on top. It is very dark in color and rich with nutrients. It's also called humus and has a rich pleasant smell. Compost can be created over time in a bin or pile by adding mulch ingredients as well as manures (high in nitrogen and beneficial bacteria), lawn cuttings, organic food waste like rinsed eggshells, fruit and vegetable scraps (no meat products) and occasional water. Compost loosens the soil and acts as a natural conditioner and fertilizer.

Both compost and mulch can be purchased at local nurseries or created by using your own garden waste. Mulch is also available **FREE** to volunteers who help out at the Manhattan Beach Botanical Garden. There is especially desirable mulch because of its complex and varied blend of elements, including some eucalyptus that gives it a fantastic perfume.

Next time you visit the Garden, don't forget to look down and notice the marvelous mulch from which all the beauty springs. A natural carpet with all the right stuff built in.

