

## **No More Mulch Mounds**

Spring is here and along with it comes the infamous mulch mounders! These well-intentioned masters of mound mulching create grand volcano shaped masterpieces, but are these mounds healthy for your trees?

### **Why mulch?**

Mulch applied correctly can help your trees live a healthy happy life. Mulch helps retain moisture, reducing the need for watering regularly, saving you money and time. It regulates soil temperature which protects delicate roots from extreme temperature fluctuations. Mulch can also keep weeds from growing and keep landscapers from nicking the base of a tree with weed eater line. When mulch breaks down it adds to the soil structure and creates an environment that helps catch and hold nutrients right where the tree needs it, the root zone.

### **What's the harm in tree mounds?**

If mulch is so beneficial for trees, then more mulch is better right? Wrong! Too much mulch suffocates tree roots and leads to too much moisture at the base of the tree. Tree roots get oxygen through the soil's contact with the air at the surface of the ground. When you put large mulch mounds around trees, these roots grow upward into the mulch mound to try to find oxygen. These new roots create an above-ground web of roots around the base of the tree and can strangle your tree over time. In addition, excess moisture and warmth at the base of the tree causes soft areas in the bark that small rodents like to chew on. Open sores on the tree caused by these rodents make the tree susceptible to diseases. All the stress on the tree caused by mulch mounds can lead to early death and costly removal of your trees.

Next time you take a walk around your neighborhood, notice the trees mulched with tree mounds. Do those trees look healthy? Do they have bark missing at the base? Do the trees appear to have a full canopy or are there dead branches? What about the tree roots? Are they above the ground and peeking out of the mulch? Missing bark, dead branches, and tree roots above the ground are all signs of poor tree health and lead to early tree death.

### **How do I apply mulch properly?**

Follow these [three steps](#) for happy healthy trees!

1. Leave a 2-3" space between the tree trunk and mulch
2. Spread mulch to the edge of the tree canopy
3. Cover tree root area with no more than 6" of mulch, 2-3" is usually sufficient

When you care for your trees, you are caring for your community. Ensure that you are using proper mulching techniques to encourage healthy, long-term growth.

Healthy, mature trees have larger canopy cover and more well-developed root systems than their juvenile counterparts. This makes them more effective at improving water infiltration, reducing stormwater runoff temperatures, and lowering summer cooling costs. Take care of your trees and help them grow with proper mulching techniques to cash in on these benefits!

### **Suggested Social Media Text**

When you care for your trees, you are caring for your community. Ensure that you are using proper mulching techniques to encourage healthy, long-term growth. For healthy trees, keep mulch 3" away from the trunk and spread 3-6" thick to the dripline. Healthy, mature trees are effective at improving infiltration, reducing stormwater runoff temperatures, and lowering summer cooling costs.

### **References and Resources:**

**PennState Extension – mulch volcanoes** <https://extension.psu.edu/mulch-volcanoes-are-erupting-everywhere>

**UNL Extension – mulch volcanoes** <https://extension.unl.edu/statewide/dodge/mulch-volcanoes-a-harmful-practice-for-trees/>

**UFI Tree care – mulching** <https://ufi.ca.uky.edu/treetalk/treecare-mulch>

**Video – proper tree mulching and saving poorly mulched trees** <https://youtu.be/fl12XNNqldA>