# 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 trees' 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 4 inches). Instead, rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and refresh the appearance.

- Do not place mulch against tree trunks.

Volcano mulching suffocates surface roots of trees.

- 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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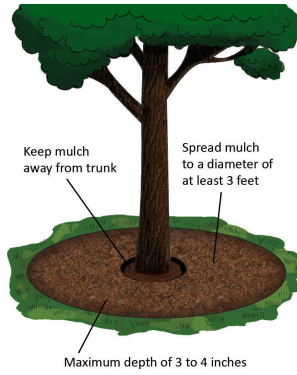


Proper mulching can help keep a tree healthy. (Sarah Cox, Purdue University)