

## **Mulch Choices for the Landscape**

**By Audrey Durr, Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program Coordinator**

Winter means fewer landscape chores so it's the perfect time to replenish mulch to a depth of two to three inches in preparation for spring. Mulch contributes to the visual appeal of a landscape by providing *unity*, which is a sense of consistency and cohesion in the landscape design. Organic mulch also provides a number of benefits to plants, including conserving soil moisture by reducing evaporation, moderating summer and winter temperature extremes, suppressing weed growth and adding nutrients to the soil as it decomposes.

The Florida-Friendly Learning Landscape behind the Extension office (3650 W. Sovereign Path, Lecanto, FL) has nine stations that demonstrate each of the nine Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles; the garden is open seven days a week from sunrise to sunset. The "Mulch" station displays six different types of mulch: melaleuca wood chips, landfill mulch, pine straw (needles), pine nuggets, lava rock and rubber mulch.

Organic mulch is any material that was recently living, such as melaleuca wood chips, landfill mulch, pine straw, pine nuggets, etc. Organic mulches should be used around plants due to their ability to hold soil moisture and add nutrients to the soil.

One of the best organic mulches available is melaleuca because it is extremely unappealing to termites and it floats less than cypress mulch. Additionally, melaleuca is an invasive species that costs Florida taxpayers millions per year for its control. The trees are harvested for mulch and the seeds are destroyed.

The Citrus County Waste Management Division offers free once-chipped and twice-chipped mulch made from yard waste at the Citrus County Central Landfill in Lecanto. Call 352-527-7670 to check availability and be sure to bring a tarp to cover the mulch.

Pine straw and pine nuggets are also excellent choices because they are by-products of the forestry industry. Pine straw adds a unique texture to the landscape and is light and easy to apply. Pine nuggets are large chunks of pine tree bark and they retain an attractive deep brown color.

Inorganic mulches include stone, shell and rubber. Although inorganic mulches are permanent, they may raise the soil pH, can heat up in the summer and do not add nutrients to the soil. Inorganic mulches are best for areas where you do not want to hold moisture, such as around a home's foundation or in pathways.

Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension's Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ program is a free public education program, funded jointly by the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners and the Coastal Rivers and Withlacoochee River Basin Boards of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. For more information, visit the University of Florida's website [www.SolutionsForYourLife.org](http://www.SolutionsForYourLife.org) or contact the Citrus County UF/IFAS Extension at 352-527-5700.

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