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Mulch has **5 main properties** which make it essential in the garden and reduces water use.

Insulates

Mulch acts like a blanket on your garden bed. Hot sun hits the top of the mulch, but because it is a loose, bulked up material, which is full of air gaps, most of the heat does not make it to the soil. Cooler soil means less water lost by evaporation. Plants grow better in more stable temperatures and less water needs to be applied.



Absorbs water

Water soaks into the mulch where it can be retained for long periods. Over time, the water is gradually released to the soil where it can be taken up by the nearby plants. Thus, mulch acts as a kind of reservoir.

Improves soil quality

As the organic matter in the mulch gets taken down into the topsoil, it makes the top layers more porous, loamy and moisture retentive. The structure of the soil improves, increasing in fiber, in nutrients and in their attractiveness to plant roots.

Stops erosion

Bare earth is not good in heavy rain. If the soil cannot absorb the water directly, it quickly builds up and starts to run sideways. As it moves, it takes soil particles with it, and, over time, carves out grooves which turn into mini torrents. Mulch helps to prevent this erosion process.

Slows down weeds and pests

When there is a thick layer of mulch on the surface, the excess water can be absorbed. The rain droplets themselves cannot dislodge soil and the erosion process has a hard time getting started. With a thick layer of mulch on your garden beds, weeds are greatly reduced. Their seeds become lodged in the surface of the mulch, but the conditions do not favor germination. So your plants can get well ahead of the weeds. The same applies to garden pests. There is so much organic material around to eat that the bugs hardly have time to attack your plants. So, as well as saving water, you will have less garden chores to do.

Tip #1:

A good rule of thumb is to apply mulch at least 2-3 inches deep around the root zone of trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetable gardens, and even to outdoor and indoor container plants.

Tip #2:

Weed fabric may be used under the mulch as an added measure to keep weeds down - **NOT** black plastic as it does not allow the exchange of water and oxygen that plant roots require.

Tip #3:

There is a golden rule for garden beds - mulch, mulch and more mulch!

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