

HELP! Addison's Trees Under Attack By Killer Volcanoes!

Do you have a mountain of mulch climbing up the tree in your yard or parkway? Does the trunk of your parkway tree look like a telephone pole buried in a pile of woodchips? If you answered yes to either question, you are very likely killing your tree.

Mulching is one of the most beneficial things a homeowner can do to keep trees healthy. When applied properly, mulch helps maintain soil moisture, control weeds, improve soil structure, insulate plant roots, and inhibit certain plant diseases. Mulch also protects plants and trees from "weed whacker" damage and lawnmower injuries - in addition to giving planting beds a uniform, well-cared-for look.

Over-mulching, however, is one of the most frequent landscaping mistakes made - often causing significant damage to the tree. The International Society of Arboriculture recommends a mulching depth of 2 to 4 inches, pulled away from the trunk of the tree to expose the "flare" of the roots. Often times, small entrepreneur landscape operations and ill-informed private homeowners pile mulch high against tree trunks to create the popular (yet harmful) "*volcano look*". The root flare (crown) and portions of the trunk are no longer visible as they are buried within the mulching material. Although the mounding of mulch high around the trees may appear aesthetically pleasing to many homeowners, reputable certified landscape contractors and arborists avoid such poor plant-health-care practices. Too much mulch - be it layers deep or piled high against tree trunks - can cause major problems and prove harmful in more ways than one, including:

- Excess moisture in the root zone, which causes plant stress and root rot
- Insect and disease problems
- Micro-nutrient deficiency or toxicity
- Weed growth
- Smelly planting beds, caused by anaerobic conditions and "sour" mulch
- Habitat creation for rodents that chew bark and girdle trees
- Surface girdling root growth in the thick decomposing mounds of mulch

Why mulch at all?

Urban landscapes are typically harsh environments with poor soil conditions, little organic matter, and big fluctuations in temperature and moisture - all "unfriendly" growing situations for trees. A 2 to 4-inch layer of organic mulch can mimic a more natural environment for trees and improve overall plant health.

When mulching, Jim Skiera, Associate Executive Director of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), says it's important to remember that the root system of a tree does not mirror the image of its top. "The roots of most trees extend out a significant distance from the trunk. Also, 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 require oxygen to survive, Skiera says. A thin layer of mulch, applied as broadly as practical, can improve the soil structure, oxygen levels, temperature, and moisture availability where these roots grow.

Mulching basics

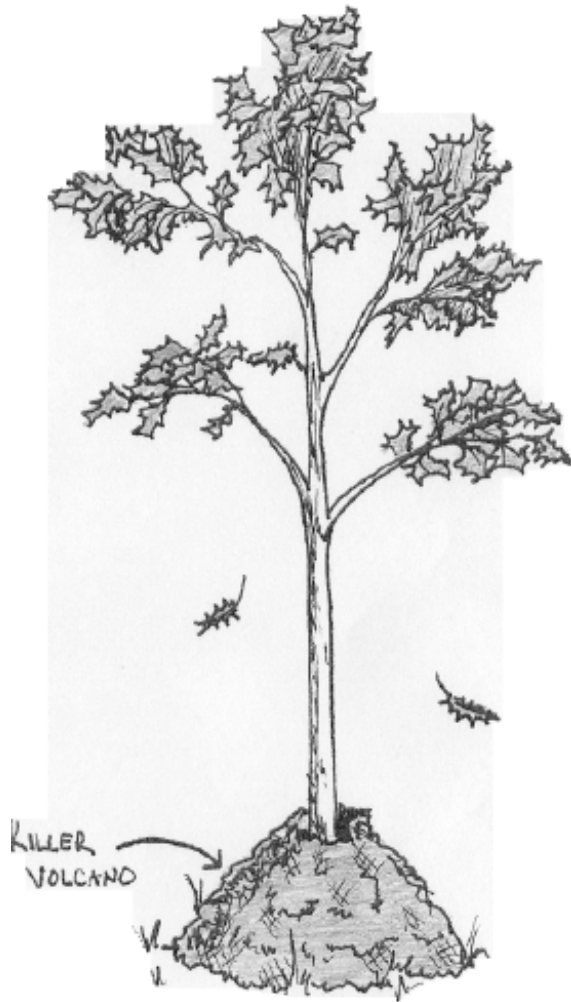
To ensure the health of your trees and plants, follow these practical mulching tips to landscape like the pros:

- For well-drained sites, apply a 2 to 4-inch layer of mulch. If drainage problems exist, use a thinner layer.
- If mulch is already present, check the depth. Do not add mulch if there is already a sufficient layer (2 to 4 inches) in place. Instead, rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and refresh the appearance.
- *Avoid placing mulch against the tree trunk.* The mulch surrounding a tree should resemble more to the likeness of a “crater” (thickest at the outer edges and shallow in the center up to the root crown) opposed to a “volcano or mound” (where mulch is mounded/piled up against the tree).
- If mulch is already piled against the stems or tree trunks, pull it back several inches so that the base of the trunk and the root crown are exposed.
- Mulch out to the tree’s drip line (branch tips) or beyond if possible.
- Most commonly available mulches work well in most landscapes. Be mindful that some plants may benefit from the use of a slightly acidifying mulch such as pine bark.
- Organic mulches are preferable for their soil-enhancing properties.

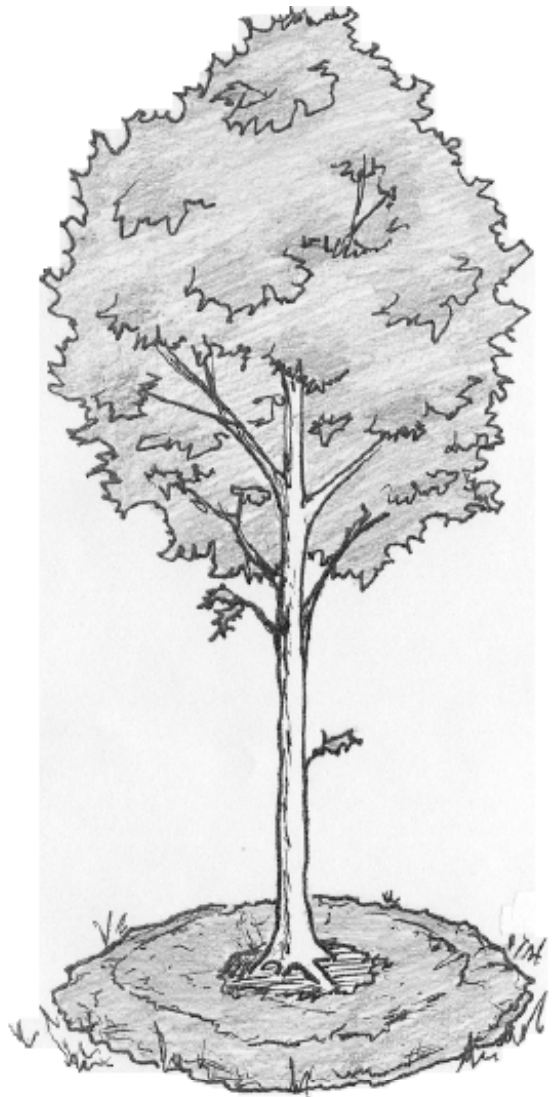
The Village of Addison provides Addison residents with *free* truckload deliveries of woodchip mulch (3 cubic yards or greater). To inquire about or arrange for the free delivery of woodchip mulch, call the Village of Addison Public Works Department at: (630) 620-2020. For residents who wish to receive less than 3 cubic yards of mulch, the Village of Addison maintains a wood chip supply for residents to access at their own convenience. Addison residents may help themselves to free mulch located at the southwest corner of the intersection at Vista and Winthrop Avenues. For further assistance, please contact Tim Tokarz, Electrical/Forestry Foreman at (630) 620-2020.

Content taken and modified from: “Proper Mulching Techniques Key to Healthy Trees”, Jim Skiera, Associate Executive Director of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), Champaign, IL.

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research around the world. Headquartered in Champaign, IL, ISA is dedicated to the care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees. For more information, contact ISA at 217-355-9411 or visit their website at www.treesaregood.org.



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MULCH**



**GOOD
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