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Mulches for restoration and mitigation projects

Mulching will improve most planting projects. The benefits of mulching can include soil moisture conservation, weed suppression, improved soil structure and nutrient regime, and reduction of surface run-off, soil erosion, and soil compaction. The benefits vary based on the kind of mulch you choose; the following table indicates the relative characteristics of the most common materials.

Material	Erosion control	Weed suppression	Nutrient provision	Availability	Longevity	Recommended depth	Sources	Installation cost	Typical material cost w/o delivery	Cost per sq. yard
Medium ground bark	Medium	High	Low	High	Medium-High	2-4"	Quarries, landscape suppliers, garden stores ¹	Medium	\$12-15/ cubic yard	\$0.91 (3" deep)
Hog fuel	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Medium-High	2-4"	Quarries, landscape suppliers, some hauling co's.	Medium	\$7-10/ cubic yard	\$0.58-0.83 (3" deep)
Wood chips w/ greens ²	Medium	High	Medium	Variable	Medium	2-4"	Arborists, other tree services	Medium	Cheap or free	n/a
Straw	Medium	Low-Medium ⁴	Low	High	Low	2-4" ⁵	Feed stores, farm supply	Low	\$5/2-string bale	\$0.11 (3" deep)
Composted yard waste ³	High	Medium	High	Medium	Low	2-4"	City or county composting programs, landscape suppliers ¹	Medium-High	\$11/ cubic yard	\$0.91 (3" deep)
Weed cloth (plastic) ⁶	Medium	Highest	None	High	High	n/a	Wholesale and on-line distributors	Medium	\$0.55-0.75/sq. yard	\$0.55-0.75
Geotextiles	Highest	Medium-High	None	High	High	n/a	Wholesale and on-line distributors	High	\$0.80-2.25/sq. yard	\$0.80-2.25

¹ Usually available through hauling companies

² Allow freshly chipped wood to sit for four weeks before applying

³ If mushroom compost or biosolids are used instead, have these materials lab tested for the presence of pesticide residues or heavy metals

⁴ While straw does offer some weed suppression, it usually also has weed seeds (mostly grasses) that may germinate at the site

⁵ Straw application rate for 2" deep is 2-3 tons/acre, for 4" deep it's 4-6 tons/acre. One 2-string bale weighs 60-70 lbs.

⁶ Weed cloth must be removed once plants are established – it may hinder rhizome and stolon growth and will take decades to break down

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