

While Brick Utilities undertakes an important reservoir improvement project, we are encouraging our customers to voluntarily conserve water in and around the home where possible. Helpful water conservation tips are available at [NJDEP Conserve Water](#) and [USEPA WaterSense](#).

Landscape Water Savings!

It's time to save water in the landscape and keep plants healthy. One way to do this is by using mulch. Mulch has many beneficial qualities when used correctly. It prevents weed seeds from germinating. It acts as insulation for the soil by keeping it cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter. It protects tree trunks, plant stems, and surface roots from lawn mowers and string trimmers. It controls soil erosion from stormwater runoff and wind by keeping the soil in place. It improves soil health by amending soil structure, aeration, and drainage while preventing soil compaction. Organic mulch increases soil fertility as it decomposes. By increasing a healthy soil microbe

community, it enhances plant root growth and facilitates water and nutrient uptake. It reduces root rot and soilborne diseases. Most importantly, it conserves water by helping to prevent evaporation of soil moisture.

It is important to know how to use mulch correctly to gain the most benefits from it. For well drained sites, apply a 2-to-4-inch layer around trees, shrubs, and bedding plants. Use a thinner layer for sites with poorer drainage. Spread it beyond a tree's drip line while keeping at least a 4-inch minimum space around the trunk. Do the same for shrubs. Never pile it around the trunk which will lead to less oxygen getting to roots, insect damage, diseases, and rot. For flower beds and vegetable gardens, keep mulch away from the stems while spreading it; and raise the depth around the bed to prevent erosion. Do not till or incorporate mulch that has not completely decomposed in the soil. It can rob nitrogen from the soil, reducing the supply to plants. It is recommended to add mulch every 2 to 3 years to maintain a total depth of 2 to 3 inches. Remember to stir up the old layer before adding new mulch to break up compacted layers and improve drainage.

Make sure to use a good quality organic mulch. It should have a pleasant earthy or woody smell and be of uniform shape with a particle size between 1/2 to 3 inches. It should not have chemical residues, viable weed seeds, or solid objects in it, such as stones, glass, metals, or plastics. If it has a sour, vinegar, sulfur, or acid smell, it was produced under anaerobic conditions. This produces either methanol, acetic acid, ammonia gas, and hydrogen sulfide gas which can cause plants to wilt, browning of leaves, leaf scorching, defoliation, or plant mortality. Some symptoms may mimic plant stresses from drought, fertilizer burn, or pesticide misapplications. Any of these symptoms can occur within 24 hours after applying sour mulch. A pH test can help determine sour mulch which will have a very acidic pH between 1.8 to 2.5. If it is suspected that sour mulch has been applied, remove it from around plants and water it heavily to help leach the anaerobic by-products from it. For bulk mulch, never store it in mounds more than 4 to 6 feet tall and turn it over frequently to keep it from going sour.

For more information on mulch please view the table on page 2 and peruse Virginia's Cooperative Extension's [Mulching: Purpose, Benefits, and Essential Information](#); Washington State Department of Ecology's [Buying and Using Organic Mulch](#); and University of Massachusetts [Hort Notes: Beware of Sour Mulch](#).



Don't forget the Spring Tune Up for Sprinklers

<p>Connect hoses and pipes to reduce leaks.</p>	<p>Direct sprinklers to spray on landscapes.</p>	<p>Inspect for broken or damaged sprinkler heads.</p>	<p>Select a WaterSense labeled controller and water smarter.</p>	<p>Need help? Go with a pro— a certified irrigation professional.</p>	
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Mulch Characteristics and Qualities

Mulch Type	Color	Texture	Decomposition Rate	Cost	Adds Carbon to Soil (Carbon: Nitrogen)	Allows Water, Air, Nutrients to Filter Through	Heats Soil or Plants	Vegetable Gardens	Can be used in Pathways	Comments
Pine Needles/Straw Bark (Pine, Cypress, Cedar, etc. chunks)	Reddish Brown Medium to Dark Brown	Fine Fine to Coarse	Fast Medium	Low Moderates	Yes; Causes low Nitrogen Yes	Yes Yes	No No	Yes Yes	Yes Yes	Will change soil pH if used as a soil amendment. Are more prone to wash away
Shredded Hardwood	Light to Medium Brown or Dyed	Medium	Slow	Moderate to High	Yes if Aged	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Dyed mulch may come from shredded or chipped wood from construction and demolition debris or pallets. This wood may have chemicals preservatives or toxins. Make sure to check with the supplier or manufacturer if these sources were used for dyed mulch.
Straw (Wheat)	Light Tan	Fine	Fast	Moderate	Yes	Yes	No if thin layer	Yes	No	It is attractive to rodents and is extremely flammable. Do not use if treated with herbicides for broadleaf weeds which will damage or kill wanted plants.
Shredded Leaves	Brown	Coarse	Medium	Low	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Whole leaves tend to blow away and mat together suppressing water movement in the soil. Leaves may harbor diseases, insects and weed seeds if not composted correctly. Some leaves from specific species, such as walnut, may be toxic to plants.
Hulls (cocoa beans, rice, buckwheat, cottonseed, and peanuts)	Brown or Tan	Fine to Coarse	Slow to Medium	Moderate to High	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Easily blown away and washed needing frequent replenishment. They can be high in Phosphorus which can be toxic to some plants. Cocoa hulls can be toxic to pets, especially dogs.
Lawn Clippings (Pesticide free)	Green	Fine	Fast	Low	Yes; Also high in Nitrogen	Yes	No if thin layer	Yes	No	Not recommended for mulch but can be used in the compost bin/pile if herbicides or pesticides not used in the lawn.
Sawdust	Light Tan	Fine to Medium	Medium	Low	Yes if aged; Causes low Nitrogen when fresh	Yes	No	No	Yes	Tends to become matted and hydrophobic, blocking water penetration. A better choice for soil amendments and not as a mulch. As an amendment, can alter soil pH.
Living Mulches/ Crop Covers/Green Manure	Green	Fine to Medium	Medium	Low to Moderate	Yes; Also high in Nitrogen	Yes	No	Yes	No	This is a temporary planting of a fast growing crop (usually a legume) that is sown in the fall and tilled under in the spring. They protect the soil from erosion and are usually left in place for about 6 months to 1 year. Legumes are efficient at fixing nitrogen from the air into the soil.
Newspaper/ Cardboard (covered with mulch)	Black & White, Brown	Solid	Slow	Low to Moderate	Yes	Yes if soaked in water before applying	No	Yes	Yes	Do not use if they contain glue, tape, waxy coating, color printing, labels or toxic chemicals. Use 3 to 4 layers of newspaper or 1 layer of cardboard. If not covering with a 1 to 2 inch layer of mulch, use pins or weigh it down to prevent from blowing away.
Wood Chips (grinds)	Light tan	Coarse	Slow	Low	Yes if Aged	Yes	No	No	Yes	May contain seeds from trees and plants that can sprout and create weed problems. Black Walnut or fresh woodchips that have not been aged (3 - 12 months) can be toxic to plants.
Coir	Dark Brown	Fine to Coarse	Very Slow	Moderate to High	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Highly renewable resource. Sait content was a concern, but current processing methods prevent this issue. Is a poor source of nutrients. It can be used as a soil amendment
Peat Moss	Dark Brown	Fine	Slow	Moderate to High	Yes	Yes if it is not dry or compacted	No	No	No	Tends to become matted and hydrophobic, blocking water penetration. A better choice for soil amendments and not as a mulch. As an amendment, can alter soil pH. Contributes to Climate change and environmental damage from releasing carbon in the atmosphere via strip mining.
Rock/Stone/ Gravel	Various	Fine to Coarse	None	Moderate to High	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Can mix with soil over time making it impossible to dig the soil. Debris is difficult to remove and can cause weed problems.
Geotextile (Landscape fabric covered with mulch)	Generally Black	Solid	Very Slow	Moderate to High	No	Yes until it becomes fully clogged with soil	Yes	No	Yes	Made from woven synthetic materials like polypropylene, polyester, polyethylene and polyamides. Weeds can grow in the mulch overlaying the material or once the fabric becomes clogged with soil.
Plastic	Clear, White, Black, Red	Solid	Very Slow	Low	No	No	Yes	Yes if short term	No	Become brittle with age leading to microplastic pollution in the environment. Each color plastic has different uses. Clear for warming soil to prepare for planting; Black to shade out weed seeds before crop planting or as part of row covers; White absorbs less heat and used as a temporary row cover; and Red reflect certain wavelengths of light to the lower plant leaves, enhancing plant growth.

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/spes/spes-661/SPES-661.pdf; <https://www.umass.edu/agriculture-food-environment/home-lawn-garden/fact-sheets/colored-bark-mulch>; <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2080/2018/03/coconut-coir.pdf>;

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has declared a Drought Warning due to a prolonged period of below normal precipitation. Please continue to conserve water by installing low-flow showerheads and toilets, replacing appliances when needed with water efficient models, running the dishwasher and washing machine only when full, and composting vegetable food waste instead of using the garbage disposal. Visit [New Jersey Drought Information](#) to learn about drought conditions. [Visit USEPA's WaterSense](#) for water conservation information.