

# Winter Mulching

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It's January. The holidays are past, decorations are put away, a new year is here. Some of us gardeners may have cabin fever and want to get outside. The good news: winter is a great time to mulch your garden beds.

Winter mulching is a simple way to protect plants throughout the cold season. Winter typically brings wide temperature fluctuations in central Virginia. Repeated freezing and thawing of the ground can cause susceptible plants to heave out of the ground, leaving them exposed to severe damage. Bark split on trees is also caused by temperature swings. Mulch will not warm or cool the plant's roots, but it will help to maintain steady soil temperatures.

Mulch will assist in suppressing weeds like chickweed and henbit that germinate in the cooler months, reducing the amount of weeding needed come springtime.



Mulching will also greatly benefit the soil. It helps prevent erosion by protecting soil from harsh wind and precipitation. Over time, organic mulches such as wood chips, shredded bark, pine needles & straw will break down and add organic matter. This increased organic matter will improve the soil's moisture retention, increase microorganisms and improve nutrient supply.

The best time to mulch is after a hard frost because it will help stabilize the soil temperatures at near freezing. Mulch 2-4 inches deep. Pull mulch away from tree trunks to discourage damage from diseases, insects, and small animals.

Applying a layer of mulch this winter will beautify your garden, protect your plants and feed your soil.

And it may just give you an extra boost of vitamin D to beat the winter blues!

## Resources

<https://wayne.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/11/winter-gardening-chores/>

<https://www.purdue.edu/hla/sites/yardandgarden/mulch-for-winter-protection-2/>

Image – Katrina McIntosh