



Black Lake Organic Nursery & Garden Store



4711 Black Lake Blvd. S.W., Olympia, WA 98512 (360) 786-0537
Organic Growing Supplies for the Maritime Northwest

Gardening Information Leaflet No.4

\$1.00

"DOING IT RIGHT"
FERTILE MULCHING
THE MINERAL-AUGMENTED ORGANIC WAY
The Only Way to Grow!

Mulching occurs in nature and serves both to protect soil and to recycle plant nutrients. An obvious example is the dropping of leaves in the forest and their accumulation and rotting down into the soil, thereby making it softer, mellow, earthy-smelling and "rich". This ancient process serves nature's purposes very well. Indeed, it assists in the creation of topsoil from fragmented rock. Mulching has also long been practiced in organic gardening and usually involves the spreading and layering of "waste" organic materials on cultivated ground around flowers, woody plants, and vegetable crop rows. In some situations, such as vegetable growing, mulching keeps soil too cool for planting and can invite slugs and mice damage, if applied too early. Mulch should not be applied until the plants are tall enough to stand above the mulch to receive sunlight.

Mulching differs from manureing and composting. It customarily has not involved added fertilizers or working the mulch materials into the soil at the time of application. The idea is to emulate nature by laying down a protective blanket which also holds in moisture and suppresses annual weeds. To a limited extent the mulch slowly supplies nutrients and increases the organic content of topsoil as it rots and gets worked down by microbes, earthworms and by burrowing insects and animals. These critters likewise are harbored, fed, and stimulated by mulch coverings. It's a good thing.

Nevertheless, it needs to be recognized that gardening and wild nature differ and that the fertility requirements of cultivated plants (especially food crops) exceed those of slowly evolved, native plants that are adapted to the area's particular soil conditions and climate. We humans seek to alter these natural conditions for our own purposes and for the special needs of introduced or specially bred plant varieties which usually cannot make it on their own in nature. Certainly the nutritional requirements of humans are difficult to meet by relying solely on natural vegetation and on the limited or incomplete fertility generally existing in many native soils as well as in worn out or depleted soils. Thus, a mere recycling of locally produced mulch materials cannot be relied on to provide the extra fertility required to produce really nutritious food crops or to meet the needs of more demanding and finicky "exotic" ornamentals.

This is where Fertile Mulching comes into play! The **Fertile Mulching System** is to be used to either supplement other fertilizing practices or substitute for standard fertilizing methods where these are difficult or impractical to carry out. Our recommended **Fertile Mulching System** gives you the added benefits of the mulch itself and has shown amazing results for customers who have used it. What is unique about the B.L.O. method is the employment of minerals to augment organic matter applied to garden soils. We refer to this as the Mineral Augmented Organic (MAO) method.

Fruit trees respond especially well to this treatment, almost as if this system was developed particularly for fruit trees. It does involve some initial work and expense, but saves work in succeeding years and results in SUPERIOR health that means fewer pest and disease problems to deal with. It also means greater abundance and quality of the fruit (or other crop part) produced over the years. Fruit will taste better and keep longer in storage. The **B.L.O. Fertile Mulching System** may be used for newly transplanted trees as well as sick trees and established, healthy trees. We will illustrate the method with trees in mind, but the principles apply to other plant forms too. There are two versions: (a) the ordinary method; (b) and the Deluxe/Gourmet method (greater returns for greater investment and care). These are described and illustrated below.

[Type text]

[Type text]

[Type text]

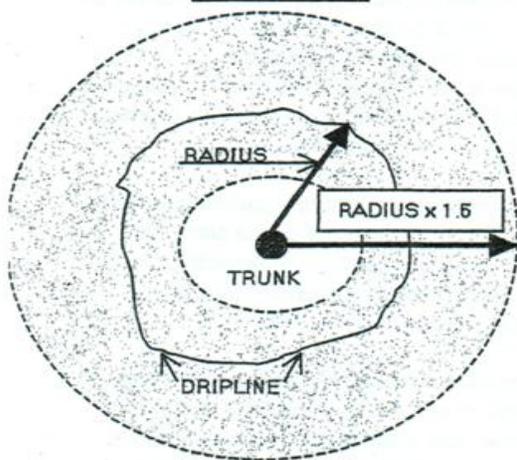
A first major consideration is the presence or potential of weeds or grass under and around your prize plant that will compete with it for nutrients and water. Basically you want to get rid of these competitors. This is most easily done with the use of thick layers of newspaper or corrugated cardboard that is well over-lapped. If the ground is bare out to the drip-line (and preferably beyond), you do not have to use the over-lapped cardboard or thick newspaper layers to smother the competitors. Also, you do not need to fertilize or mulch within the first foot of the trunk, but it won't hurt, as long as the mulch isn't placed directly against the trunk where it could foster rot or mouse damage. It is widely believed that a tree's roots extend only out as far as the branches (to the 'drip line'); however, most of the feeder roots of trees lie in a wide zone inside and outside the drip line, thus you want to mulch out half again the distance from the trunk to the outer edge of the foliage for best results (See Drawing #1, below). Fertilizers and mulch should be renewed or added to the top each year and extended outward as the tree gets bigger.

The **Fertile Mulching System** involves a **Rule Of Four**. First mow down and rake off any grass or weeds below the tree canopy (note: these can be put back on as layer 3, discussed below). Next, wet the ground thoroughly with either: a) water, or b) a Witches' Brew consisting of 1 tbsp. per gallon of water of 1) liquid fish, 2) liquid seaweed, 3) black strap molasses, and 4) natural vinegar (note: this brew may also be sprayed on the foliage monthly to help feed the plant through spring and summer. Do this on cloudy days). An added gourmet treat would be spraying **Compost Tea** once or twice a month on the foliage and ground. A further treat would be inoculation with mycorrhizal fungi.

Next comes FOUR layers of fertilizer and mulch materials. These are shown in Drawing 2 listing the optional layering methods (a - Ordinary, and b - Deluxe). These layers increase in thickness and coarseness as you go up. First spread BLO's **Tree and Shrub Fertilizer Mix** beneath the tree (and beyond) according to the label rates (note: use BLO's **Rhododendron and Blueberry Mix** for "acid-loving" plants and BLO's **Organic Rose Food** for rosebushes). That is layer 1. Layer 2 is (a) 1/2 inch of quality compost or aged manure (second choice), or (b) quality worm castings for the deluxe route. Layer 3 is 1 inch of a) grass clippings and/or shredded tree leaves, or b) rice hulls, cocoa bean hulls, chopped alfalfa hay, or similar fine organic materials.

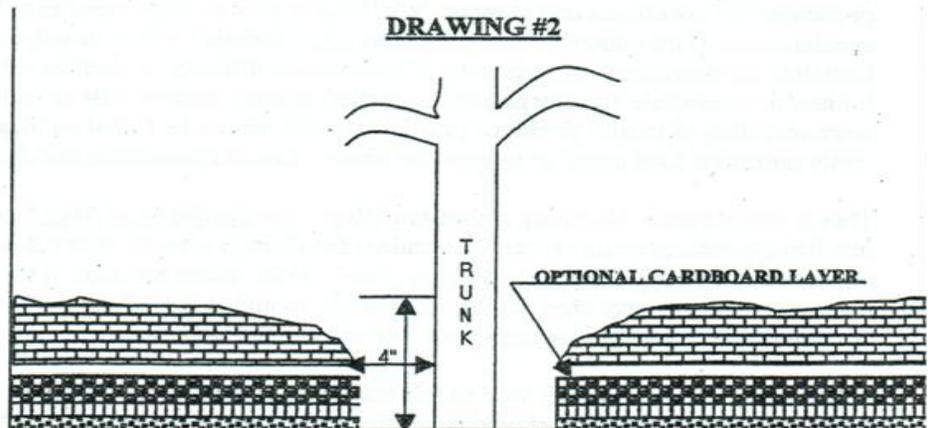
Next would come the optional cardboard or newspaper layers (where needed) to block grass and weed growth. It's a good idea to wet down this cardboard/paper layer to initiate its biodegrading (i.e., rotting). For the fourth and final layer, cover all of this with a coarse mulch material such as ground wood or bark to a total depth of FOUR inches. Remember, nature uses rotted bark and wood as part of her mulching of the forest floor to foster seedlings. We should be as caring. Within a year or two of applying B.L.O.'s **Fertile Mulching System** you will see fantastic growth and renewal in your perennial and woody plants.

DRAWING #1



- Gray area is the Feeder Root Zone
- Apply Fertile Mulching System over the Feeder Root Zone
- Keep mulch away from trunk (4 inches or more)

DRAWING #2



A. Regular Method

- I. Tree and Shrub Fertilizer
- II. 1/2" Compost or Aged Manure
- III. 1" Grass Clippings; leaves
- IV. About 3" Ground Wood or Bark

B. Deluxe Method

- I. Tree and Shrub Fertilizer
- II. 1/2" Quality Worm Castings
- III. 1" Rice Hulls, Cocoa Bean Hulls, Alfalfa Hay, Alfalfa Meal
- IV. About 3" Ground Wood or Bark