

The Pine Straw Mulch Advantage: How pine straw outperforms other mulches

by Scott Jacobs



Mulch is a very important tool in the garden and landscape that:

- helps prevent loss of topsoil from wind and water erosion
- reduces water usage by maintaining soil moisture
- reduces rainwater runoff
- reduces soil compaction
- lessens soil temperature fluctuations
- improves soil tilth
- makes the landscape more attractive
- reduces maintenance
- reduces weed growth
- insulates soil to keep plants cooler in summer and warmer in winter
- improves soil aeration, structure, and drainage over time
- improves soil fertility
- inhibits certain plant diseases
- reduces damage from trimmers and lawn mowers

All of these qualities not only improve the health of your garden and landscape, but subsequently improve its overall beauty as well.

There are many types of mulches to choose from. One type, pine straw (sometimes referred to as pine needles), outperforms other mulches in many ways. But before I discuss that, let me explain what pine straw is.

Pine straw comes from several different species of pine trees, and these trees drop their leaves (needles or straw) naturally throughout the year. Once the straw drops to the ground, it is baled, without ever having to cut down a single tree. Since it is produced naturally and sustainably, I sometimes refer to it as the “guilt-free” mulch.

Each species’ straw will have its own unique characteristics, such as needle length, wax content, and needle flexibility to name a few. The Loblolly species of pine straw for instance, with a needle length ranging from about six to nine inches, makes it easy to apply and shape, and the needle size is the optimum for allowing the soil to breathe well while allowing excellent water infiltration.

Pine straw bales are usually available in either a round or square shape, and of varying weights and sizes. They are easy to carry and easy to store. In size and appearance, they are very similar to small hay bales.

Besides it being produced naturally and sustainably, there are numerous garden and landscape health and beauty advantages to using pine straw mulch. Some of the ways pine straw outperforms other mulches are:

- Longevity – it doesn't float and wash away and breaks down more slowly, so it doesn't need to be reapplied as frequently as other mulches
- Lightweight – it is easier to handle and lighter per cubic foot than other mulches: one large bale can cover as much area as 30 cubic feet of most mulches!
- Cost – the cost per square foot is competitive with other mulches
- Soil health – it breathes better, doesn't compact, and allows for better water infiltration
- Simple – it is easy to apply: just unroll the bales and scatter by hand
- Pest free – it doesn't attract termites
- Plant health – it adds organic material and nutrients to soil and reduces weeds
- Visually appealing - the uniform color and fine texture of pine straw brings out the color, contrast, and texture of your landscape
- Erosion control – you can use it where grass won't grow to hold soil
- Great for bird nests - used frequently for bird nests and bird houses

Mulching is undeniably the single best thing you can do for your garden and landscape. Using pine straw as your mulch will not only save you time and money, but can give you a garden that is the envy of your neighborhood!

Scott Jacobs is the owner of Pine Straw Info (www.PineStrawInfo.com), an internet information source for everything you want to know about pine straw (pinestraw and pine needle) mulch, including where you can buy it, photos, testimonials from gardeners and landscapers, and an online calculator to determine the amount of pine straw needed for your garden or landscape project.

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