

Gardening Department

Mulching & Weed Prevention in the Shrub Bed

Each spring, as we wake up from our Winter hibernation, we can't wait to dress up our beds for spring. Sometimes the first sight we see is weeds, some left over from fall, some are new arrivals. Before mulching we want to clean these up first. You can use a cultivator tool to mechanically lift the weeds, but it is much easier to spray. If the temperature is above 60 degrees, *Roundup* will do a great job on all types of weeds. In cooler weather, *Weed Beater Ultra* will do the job. Don't worry, these weed killers will not "travel" or stay in the soil to hurt your plants. If you are worried about overspray, a piece of cardboard held between the weeds and your plants will protect your garden friends. If you wish to be organic, *Burnout* is natural and very effective on most weeds. These products start to work in hours, but it is best to spray at least one to two days before mulching.

Next, a *Garden Weasel* rotary cultivator should be used to break up old mulch and work into the soil. This allows water and nutrients to get into the roots, and not be a barrier. Now apply a fertilizer (4-4-4). This will give your plants the nutrition they need to produce an abundance of flowers and leaves.

You are now ready to mulch. There are many types of commercially available mulch, and all will help with suppressing weeds and moisture retention – the choice is yours. Very popular are color-dyed mulches. Color-dyed mulches are coated with natural food dyes that are non-toxic. Since the color is dyed in, it stays darker longer than other mulches. If you wish to stay totally natural, a triple ground mulch or root mulch will provide a finely ground cover. An occasional light raking will keep your mulch looking fresh all season.

The final step is to apply a weed preventer like *Preen*. This will stop any new weed seeds from sprouting in your new mulch, without hurting your existing plants including any newly planted annuals. Make sure the product is spread evenly through the beds and not missing in any areas.

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Water after application to wash the product off leaves and to activate it into the mulch. To control weeds all season, re-apply the *Preen* in 2 1/2 to 3 months and spot spray as needed with your weed spray of choice. You are done, so now sit back and enjoy your beautiful shrub beds all season.

