

Description

Mulching consists of evenly applying straw, hay, shredded wood mulch, rock, bark or compost to disturbed soils and securing the mulch by crimping, tackifiers, netting or other measures. Mulching helps reduce erosion by protecting bare soil from rainfall impact, increasing infiltration, and reducing runoff. Although often applied in conjunction with temporary or permanent seeding, it can also be used for temporary stabilization of areas that cannot be reseeded due to seasonal constraints.

Mulch can be applied either using standard mechanical dry application methods or using hydromulching equipment that hydraulically applies a slurry of water, wood fiber mulch, and often a tackifier.



Photograph MU-1. An area that was recently seeded, mulched, and crimped.

Appropriate Uses

Use mulch in conjunction with seeding to help protect the seedbed and stabilize the soil. Mulch can also be used as a temporary cover on low to mild slopes to help temporarily stabilize disturbed areas where growing season constraints prevent effective reseeded. Disturbed areas should be properly mulched and tacked, or seeded, mulched and tacked promptly after final grade is reached (typically within no longer than 14 days) on portions of the site not otherwise permanently stabilized.

Standard dry mulching is encouraged in most jurisdictions; however, hydromulching may not be allowed in certain jurisdictions or may not be allowed near waterways.

Do not apply mulch during windy conditions.

Design and Installation

Prior to mulching, surface-roughen areas by rolling with a crimping or punching type roller or by track walking. Track walking should only be used where other methods are impractical because track walking with heavy equipment typically compacts the soil.

A variety of mulches can be used effectively at construction sites. Consider the following:

| Mulch | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Functions | |
| Erosion Control | Yes |
| Sediment Control | Moderate |
| Site/Material Management | No |

- Clean, weed-free and seed-free cereal grain straw should be applied evenly at a rate of 2 tons per acre and must be tacked or fastened by a method suitable for the condition of the site. Straw mulch must be anchored (and not merely placed) on the surface. This can be accomplished mechanically by crimping or with the aid of tackifiers or nets. Anchoring with a crimping implement is preferred, and is the recommended method for areas flatter than 3:1. Mechanical crimpers must be capable of tucking the long mulch fibers into the soil to a depth of 3 inches without cutting them. An agricultural disk, while not an ideal substitute, may work if the disk blades are dull or blunted and set vertically; however, the frame may have to be weighted to afford proper soil penetration.
- Grass hay may be used in place of straw; however, because hay is comprised of the entire plant including seed, mulching with hay may seed the site with non-native grass species which might in turn out-compete the native seed. Alternatively, native species of grass hay may be purchased, but can be difficult to find and are more expensive than straw. Purchasing and utilizing a certified weed-free straw is an easier and less costly mulching method. When using grass hay, follow the same guidelines as for straw (provided above).
- On small areas sheltered from the wind and heavy runoff, spraying a tackifier on the mulch is satisfactory for holding it in place. For steep slopes and special situations where greater control is needed, erosion control blankets anchored with stakes should be used instead of mulch.
- Hydraulic mulching consists of wood cellulose fibers mixed with water and a tackifying agent and should be applied at a rate of no less than 1,500 pounds per acre (1,425 lbs of fibers mixed with at least 75 lbs of tackifier) with a hydraulic mulcher. For steeper slopes, up to 2000 pounds per acre may be required for effective hydroseeding. Hydromulch typically requires up to 24 hours to dry; therefore, it should not be applied immediately prior to inclement weather. Application to roads, waterways and existing vegetation should be avoided.
- Erosion control mats, blankets, or nets are recommended to help stabilize steep slopes (generally 3:1 and steeper) and waterways. Depending on the product, these may be used alone or in conjunction with grass or straw mulch. Normally, use of these products will be restricted to relatively small areas. Biodegradable mats made of straw and jute, straw-coconut, coconut fiber, or excelsior can be used instead of mulch. (See the ECM/TRM BMP for more information.)
- Some tackifiers or binders may be used to anchor mulch. Check with the local jurisdiction for allowed tackifiers. Manufacturer's recommendations should be followed at all times. (See the Soil Binder BMP for more information on general types of tackifiers.)
- Rock can also be used as mulch. It provides protection of exposed soils to wind and water erosion and allows infiltration of precipitation. An aggregate base course can be spread on disturbed areas for temporary or permanent stabilization. The rock mulch layer should be thick enough to provide full coverage of exposed soil on the area it is applied.

Maintenance and Removal

After mulching, the bare ground surface should not be more than 10 percent exposed. Reapply mulch, as needed, to cover bare areas.