

MULCH CORNER

UTILITY MULCH

By John Ferguson

This is the 31st article on mulches and the last in the series for a while. Today I want to talk about a new type of mulch called "Utility Mulch". This mulch is NOT for use in horticulture or growing plants.

This spring we were approached by a waste company that was working with Home Depot and some sawmills whom wanted to recycle their wood waste. For example when Home Depot cuts boards for customers there is a lot of scraps pieces, there is shipping crates for appliances and other wood that were going to the landfill where it creates greenhouse gasses. Sawmills often have irregular pieces of wood, pieces with small pieces of bark on them, etc. that they cannot sell. This collection of wood scraps is mainly pine with some oak mixed in.

We take this wood waste and grind it up to a small, useful size that is easy to handle. Since it is made up of small dry pieces of wood that are soft and brittle, it is very easy to grind (inexpensive as compared to logs and other larger material). This material has a very high carbon to nitrogen ratio, hence it is not good for use on plants. We call it utility mulch.

We have been testing this mulch at our facility for many months and have found several good uses for it.

One of the uses is on our roads. During the hot dry summer a compost/mulch facility can be a very dusty place. In areas where we have covered our roads with it we have reduced our dust problem by at least 80%! We no longer have the expense of watering these roads for dust control. It also keeps mud from getting on equipment and other vehicles in rainy weather when one drives on it.

It also makes a great base for a temporary parking area keeping cars from getting stuck in the mud.



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Another great use is in filtering storm water. We have created berms with this mulch to filter storm water. As the run-off passes through the mulch it filters the water removing any sediment. Due to the high carbon content, it allows microbes to absorb any dissolved nutrients removing them from the water. The result is a very clean water that is finally discharged from the property. It works better than silt fence, is easier to use

and install and lower costs to remove after a project is finished (just use a tractor with a box blade and spread over the ground).

If this material is used around parking lots, storm water drains etc. it will remove oils, antifreeze and other chemicals from the storm water (the microbes bio-degrade the chemicals into harmless components) and prevent them from entering our streams. These types of berms only need to be 12-15 inches tall to be effective.

We used to have a problem with people driving ATV's onto our property. By making the berms very tall the ATV's cannot climb and cross them creating a natural barrier. We have also noticed that the soil under these large berms has stayed moist even in the drought we have experienced the last couple of years and plants planted near them did not suffer from drought damage as compared to plants further away. Also after a few years the mulch is broken down into humus and the soil has become very rich.

We have found this Utility Mulch works well for temporary work areas as it keeps us out of the mud when there is wet conditions and allows work to continue without having to wait until an area dries out.

Another use we have found is on paths and walk ways between planting beds. The high carbon content reduces weed growth and makes a nice area to walk on and again keeping one from getting muddy during wet conditions.

Below are a few pictures illustrating the use of this mulch.

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Now that we have discovered several uses for it we are giving free for non-profits till the end of the year and one only pays for delivery costs.

The first is a close up of the mulch. The second picture is using it on our roads and the third picture is on the side of a large berm.



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