

Mulching Craze Gone Wild in Loudoun County

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Surpassing disease and infestation as the worst issues that are killing our trees, is a human-influenced cause of urban tree decline: *over-mulching*.

Within the next decade, over-mulching will be the number one cause of urban tree deterioration, if we don't learn about and understand how mulching at the base of trees affects the trees roots, and ultimately, their health. The tree decline from over-mulching is in full force, and the time is overdue to educate the public to try and save our trees.



Mulched tree for beauty purposes.

The initial purpose of mulching at the base of trees is to hold in moisture at the base of a newly planted tree until the roots are well established. This is typically within the first two years after planting, after which mulching should cease, so the tree can establish a healthy normal root flare.

Mulching beyond the first two years is “over-mulching,” and it is a craze that is happening with the growth of landscaping activity that cares only about how a yard “looks,” and not about the future health of the trees.



Girdling tree roots.



When mulch breaks down, it turns into composted soil. Tree roots opportunistically grow towards oxygen, water and nutrients, and looser soil, which is what the mulch-turned-compost is. The problem is that the newly-composted soil is above the ground, where people have laid the mulch, but trees roots are supposed to grow deeper into the ground, not to the surface.



This upward root-growth starts girdling around the main root flare of the tree, strangling out the vascular cambium which, over time, causes the trees deterioration and eventual death. The tree becomes strangled, like a noose around one's neck.

Instead of mulching around your trees this year, try keeping the tree free from mulch, and watch your tree flourish over time.

Normal root flare.

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