

Gaston Grower Spotlight November 2022



Fresh Mulch in Late Fall

With the holiday season fast approaching many folks will be expecting visitors this year. Putting out fresh mulch serves multiple purposes come November. Yes, the landscape comes to life with fresh color on the ground and your visitors will be impressed. There are more benefits than wowing the in-laws. Mulch layers break down over time, so adding a thin layer can maintain insulation for overwintering plants, hold moisture, and prevent some weeds from germinating in spring. The most beneficial component in my opinion is that I get to scout to make management decisions

My first step is to remove any weeds that are still hanging on from summer and annual weeds that have just begun to germinate. Make a note of the weeds that were growing during the warmer weather, these weeds most likely went to seed and will need to be managed next spring/summer. Any of the cool season annual weeds that are removed you've caught them in time before they have been able to release seed. I prefer not to use pre-emergent herbicides so I have the flexibility to plant year round, but if I were to use a pre-emergent in February/March the notes I have on summer weeds would allow me to choose the most effective option of weed prevention.

I also make decisions on winter pruning at this time. For example, I know in January I will be tree forming a tea olive, cutting back some unruly shoots on distylium, and cutting back some butterfly bush. It is also a good time to make a note of any perennials that are struggling or need to be replaced.

Back to the Mulch:

You can save some money on mulch this season by buying by the 1/2 yard at most local landscape supply businesses. A half yard will cost \$20-25 dollars and is the equivalent of 13.5 2 cubic ft. bags. Disadvantages to buying loose mulches include needing the appropriate hauling equipment and the extra labor for moving material. If it is delivered the costs often even out between the two options. Pine straw is another great option, supports North Carolina landowners, and is a more sustainable choice considering it is a byproduct of growing forest land. It is always best to learn the source of the mulch material you choose. Rock mulches while ornamental do not offer the same insulating and moisture holding properties a straw or wood mulch offers. All of those leaves in your yard will also work as a great mulch layer this time of year if aesthetics isn't a priority.

Whether homeowner or landscape professional putting out mulch is a great opportunity to interact with and plan the management of a landscape.

