

# Ottiger Tree Service, LLC Tree Care Tips



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## Mulching in May? Too "Mulch" of a Good Thing Can Be Harmful to Your Trees

Mulching is an important part of the upkeep and care of your trees, but too much of a good thing can cause more harm than benefit! Too much mulch can cause rot to root systems, insect infestation, and improper hydration. Unfortunately, mulching is one of the easiest things to do incorrectly when it comes to landscaping.

**Survey the area!** Check the area around plants and trees that are to be mulched. Determine whether drainage is adequate, and whether any other plants in the area will be affected by mulching. Most common mulch available will work well in the majority of landscapes, but some plants benefit more from less acidic mulch, like pine bark.

**Check the Depth!** If there is already a mulched area of your landscape, check to be sure that it is not higher than 2-4 inches. Raking old

mulch will break up layers that may have become matted together, and refresh the appearance of your landscape.

### Don't Pile it too High!



"Mulch volcanoes" cause many problems for trees.

keeping both the base of the tree and its root crown exposed. It should be no more than 2-4 inches high and should extend to the trees drip line or beyond. Mulching the entire root system is highly recommended.

To allow for proper soil aeration, drainage, and reduction in weeds, a mulch layer should be kept several inches from the trunk,



Mulch wide—not deep.

### Choose the Right Mulch!

Composted wood chips can make great mulch, especially when they contain a blend of leaves, bark, and wood. Fresh wood chips can also be used around well established trees and shrubs. Organic mulches are preferable to inorganic materials due to their soil enhancing properties.

"All things in moderation should be a homeowner's mulching motto," says Jim Skiera, Executive Director of ISA. "As beneficial as mulch is, too much can be harmful in more ways than one." When applied properly, mulch helps maintain soil moisture, control weeds, improve soil structure, and

inhibit certain plant diseases. Mulch also protects plants and trees from "weed whacker" damage and "lawnmower blight" in addition to giving planting beds a uniform, well cared-for look.

### Our Mission:

*We are dedicated to maintaining the balance between tree health, customer safety & satisfaction, and raising the standards of the arboriculture industry.*

### Membership Affiliations:

- St. Louis Arborist Association  
[www.stlouisarborists.com](http://www.stlouisarborists.com)
- Tree Care Industry Association  
[www.tcia.org](http://www.tcia.org)
- International Society of Arboriculture  
[www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com)



### This Month We Are Looking to Meet:

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Ottiger Tree Service (OTS) offers tree/brush removal, pruning and deadwooding to the greater St. Louis area.

We are a first-generation, family-owned business, and proud of our reputation as a dependable and quality-oriented arbor care services company.

With ISA Certified Arborists on staff, we are staying up-to-date on the latest techniques and information because these professionals have passed extensive exams covering all aspects of tree care and have continuing education requirements to maintain certification and accreditation.

## Mulching Basics

To ensure the health of your trees and plants, follow these practical mulching tips to landscape, like the pros:

- For well-drained sites, apply a 2- to 4-inch layer of mulch. If drainage problems exist, use a thinner layer.
- If mulch is already present, check the depth. Do not add mulch if there is already a sufficient layer (2 to 4 inches) in place. Instead, rake the old mulch to break up any matted layers and refresh the appearance.
- Avoid placing mulch against the tree trunks.
- If mulch is already piled against the stems or tree trunks, pull it back several inches so that the base of the trunk and the root crown are exposed.

- Mulch out to the tree's drip line or beyond if possible.
- Most commonly available mulches work well in most landscapes. Be mindful of the fact that some plants may benefit from the use of a slightly acidifying mulch such as pine bark.
- Organic mulches are preferable for their soil-enhancing properties. Be sure it is well aerated and composted to avoid sour-smelling mulch.

Avoid using uncomposted wood chips that have been piled deeply without exposure to oxygen. Use composted wood chips instead, especially when they contain a blend of leaves, bark, and wood.

But too much mulch - be it layers deep or piled high against tree trunks - can cause major problems, including:

- Excess moisture in the root zone, which causes plant stress and root rot;
- Insect and disease problems;
- Micro-nutrient deficiency or toxicity;
- Weed growth;
- Smelly planting beds, caused by anaerobic conditions and "sour"
- Habitat creation for rodents that chew bark and girdle trees.

For more information on acceptable mulching practices, contact an ISA Certified Arborist, or visit [treesaregood.org](http://treesaregood.org).

Information provided by:  
[www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org)



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