

MULCHES: THE FACTS

KEY POINTS

Myths about mulches

Facts about mulches

Where to use organic and inorganic mulches

Coarse mulches are best

Mulch is a layer of material on the surface of a soil. A mulch may consist of:

- some of the soil itself. The dry upper part of a gravelly or sandy soil is an excellent mulch. Some clay soils self-mulch as they dry out. Light raking of other soils after every rain or irrigation can create and maintain such a layer.
- organic materials such as wood chips, chunky pine bark, green organics



Loose surface soil makes an excellent mulch around this Wreath leschenaultia in inland Western Australia.

composts, cereal straw, pea straw, bagasse (sugarcane mulch) and so on.

- a layer of inorganic material such as scoria, gravel, water-worn pebbles, crushed lateritic rock (WA) or crushed bricks.

Myths about mulches

Myth 1. Organic mulches should be spread around **all** garden plants and to depths of 70–100 mm. Many gardening books, retail packs and most water authority websites make this sort of recommendation. The factual information provided on the next few pages will show you that this is not universally sensible and, for some organic mulches, is totally silly.

Myth 2. Organic mulches will reduce water loss from a garden by up to 70%. While it can be true that a dry organic mulch will reduce evaporation from moist soil below it by 70%, the plants growing in the soil will still be