Mulching is an art and I believe I have met the Master of the Art of Mulching right here in Kingman. Meet Mr. Glenn Davis, a 34 year resident of Kingman, whom I believe has mastered the Art of Mulching. Mr. Glenn’s entire orchard: which consist of 14 Almond trees, two Pecan trees, three Apple trees, two Cherry trees, a Pear, a Plum, and a Fig tree. His vineyard includes 15 grape vines with at least four different varieties, and his vegetable, tomatoes, beans and watermelon to name a few, the entirely covered in mulch. Oh, I left out his blackberries and five Pomegranates. From six inches to two feet, almost every square foot of his orchard and gardening area is covered in mulch, and there is not a weed anywhere. All of the mature trees are producing fruit or nuts, and the grape gives are heavily laden with beautiful clusters of grapes. The tomatoes are ripening and the watermelons have set on the vines. You can literally eat your way thru this mulch paradise.
Glenn Davis's orchard is covered in two feet of mulch. The blue tubs were cut and placed around the trees to keep the mulch 12 inches from the base of the trees.
What is mulch?

Mulch is defined as a protective covering placed around plants to prevent evaporation of moisture, freezing of roots and weed growth. It can be coarse or fine and even consist of rocks in some landscapes. A two to six-inch layer of fine-textured mulch, straw, crushed leaves, grass clippings or compost should be around bedding plants and shrubs. For trees add a layer of 12-inch thick course mulch such as wood chips, or fine textured mulch. Regardless of its composition, mulch provides many benefits.

Mulch saves rainwater

Up to 75% of natural rainfall water in urban areas is lost to storm drains. Mulching will help retain a major portion of this precious water, and while doing so helps stop erosion.

Mulch adds soil nutrients

Most mulches release natural humic acids that are broken down by soil microbes. These acids neutralize alkali deposits frequently found in our native soil, and make nutrients such as nitrogen, more readily available to plants.

Mulch retains moisture

Mulch cools the soil reducing water loss thru evaporation during the hot summer months, and acts as an insulation blanket in the cool winter months. With our intense heat this summer I cannot stress this point enough. Besides being healthy for your plants it reduces your water bill.
Mulch keeps weeds out

A four-inch layer of mulch will practically eliminate weeds for your landscape. I know that would break your heart.

Aesthetic application of mulch

Depending on the color and texture of the mulch you are using, mulch can soften or add colorful lines to your landscape. If you have an open space with no vegetation, cover it with rock. Surround the nearby tree with wood chips; this will create an interesting blend of textures.

If you do not have a drip irrigation system, like Mr. Glenn does, keep mulch two to four inches from plant stems and 12 inches tree trunks. To keep mulch from settling at the base of your plants and trees, form a barrier using bender board, plastic garden edging or any material that you can form into a ring. There is no need to place a plastic liner under the mulch. In fact the placing of plastic will inhibit water absorption when in rains, reduce penetration of nutrients, and prevent the soil from breathing.

That’s all good, but where do I get all this mulch? Straw is not expensive and readily available from the local feed stores. Check with your local tree trimmers for the possibility of obtaining wood chips. Be sure to ask what kind of trees or shrubs they have been chipping. You do not want Oleander (Nerium oleander) because all parts are poisonous to both humans and animals if ingested or Caster Beans (Ricinus communis) because the beans or seeds are poisonous. Too much pine will make your soil to acidic, so use it sparingly. Grass clippings are good, but you need to ask how much insecticide or artificial chemicals were used on the grass before it was
mowed. Most important you do not want a lot of weed seeds, or other debris. What you are aiming for is a natural decomposition of the mulch to release nutrients back into the soil, while preventing weed growth and most importantly retaining moisture.

In Mr. Glenn’s words “don’t be bashful about the amount of mulch you apply.”

Remember, to check out the Farmers’ Market, Sundays, 8:00 – 11:00 AM at 101 E. Beale Street, Kingman.

For more information on mulching or compost contact The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension at 101 E. Beale Street, Suite A, Kingman or telephone 928-753-3788.

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