

Recommendations on the Use of Wood Mulches in the Landscape

The ecological benefits of wood mulches are many such as soil enhancement, water conservation, weed control and aesthetics. Unfortunately, wood mulches also present fire dangers which must be considered, especially in the dense neighborhoods of Oakmont.

This information reflects the best advice from respected experts, such as Dr. Stephen Quarles, renown research scientist on how building materials, building designs and wood mulches perform in wildfires.

It must be emphasized that any wood mulch can be ignited by embers or a ground fire and possibly carry a fire to a structure. Some wood mulches are more dangerous than others, but caution must be used when applying any type of wood mulch.

1) In the 0-5 foot zone from buildings and attached decks:

- No wood or rubber mulches are allowed.
- Rock or gravel mulches are acceptable.

2) In the 5-30 foot zone and further zones:

- No redwood or cedar gorilla hair mulches or rubber mulches are allowed.
- It is highly recommended that dyed wood mulches are not used.
- Other wood mulches are allowed such as Arbor Mulch. Note: larger size wood mulches over 1 inch in size are harder to ignite from embers so their use is encouraged.
- Organic compost products may be used as a mulch, but they can smolder and carry a hidden fire danger.
- Avoid putting wood mulches immediately adjacent to a deck, fence or other structures made from combustible materials.
- Leaves are a natural beneficial mulch for plants but limit their depth to 2 inches.

3) Wood mulches shall not be applied deeper than 3 inches.

4) Regardless of the type of wood mulch used, wood mulch should not be installed in a widespread or continuous manner. Islands of wood-mulched plantings shall be separated from each other with hardscape elements such as concrete, rock or other noncombustible material.

5) Wood mulch and rock samples must be presented to the Architectural Committee along with a landscape plan, before their installation. The size of wood-mulched and noncombustible areas will depend on site specific conditions.