

'VOLCANO MULCHING' IS DAMAGING TREES

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THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA, SOUTH TEXAS UNIT

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WHAT IS VOLCANO MULCHING?

Mulch is piled high around a tree trunk in the mistaken idea that this is helpful to preserve soil moisture and reduce the amount of water the tree needs. Wrong! Every homeowner can easily make prevent or remedy this in their own landscape or community.



Volcano mulching causes the tree trunk base (where it meets ground) to decay. Once decay and rot set in, the door opens for insect damage and eventual tree death.

The “root flare” a tree develops as it ages is important to its health and stability as you can see in these gorgeous old oaks in Houston's Museum District.

(M.L. Phillips photo)

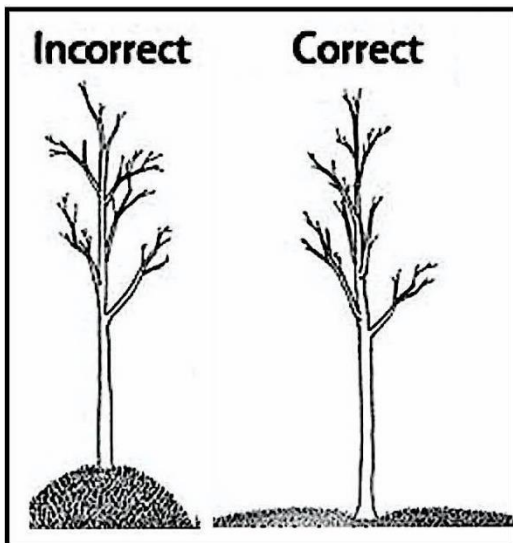
Think of these natural root flares as the tree's feet. Smothering the root flare with soil or mulch limits the amount of oxygen that the tree needs in this area.

Mulch should be applied starting a foot or more away from the tree trunk, depending on the age and size of your tree. Old oaks may need five feet or more clear of mulch.

Pictured: Susan removes volcano mulch and soil from a live oak on Bellaire Blvd. to free a root flare which can be seen on the left.

(Joyce Gigout photo)

Want to add soil underneath your trees? Add only about one inch a year and never up against the tree trunk.



Spread mulch with a depth of only a few inches starting away from the tree trunk and root flare out a couple feet toward the drip line – the outside perimeter of the tree's branches. This helps moderate hot and cold soil temperatures and preserve moisture for your tree.

Replenish the mulch when needed but do not apply too much at a time. A heavy mulch layer can prevent water from soaking down into tree roots. Replenish mulch in fall and again in spring. Use a natural mulch, not one dyed with harmful chemicals. As a natural mulch breaks down, it enriches soil fertility which greatly benefits trees. Two

excellent resources:



- [“Morton Arboretum Mulch”](#) — YouTube video.
- [Howard Garrett, aka “The Dirt Doctor”](#) — YouTube video.

PROTECT ALL TREES - INCLUDING HERBAL TREES -- In my own garden: bay trees, olive, avocado, peach, Mexican lime, and Meyer Improved lemon also outstanding. Almond verbena has grown taller than predicted with blossoms that bring the bees in droves. The ten-foot loblolly pine tree planted 15+/- years ago produces pine cones which contain pine nuts. Banana trees were rescued from a neighbor's home before demolition. Scarlet buckeye is a tribute to my grandparents from the buckeye state. Pecans keep the squirrels happy. Sassafras tree leaves turn red in fall. Intriguing lime green blossoms appear in early spring before new leaves. Huge oaks bordering my property belong to neighbors; their acorns can be pulverized to make flour.

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NOTE: For Susan's full article in the Nov. 2020 issue of *The Herb Society of America, South Texas Unit*: <http://www.herbsociety-stu.org>. Click on "About Us", Click on "Newsletters". Then click on Nov. 2020 newsletter for Volcano Mulching article.

[\(Incorrect/Correct tree sketch from Morton Arboretum\)](#)