

# Mulching

**Mulching is the single most effective preventative care that you can provide for your trees.**

It is more effective than . . .

fertilizing

trimming

spraying

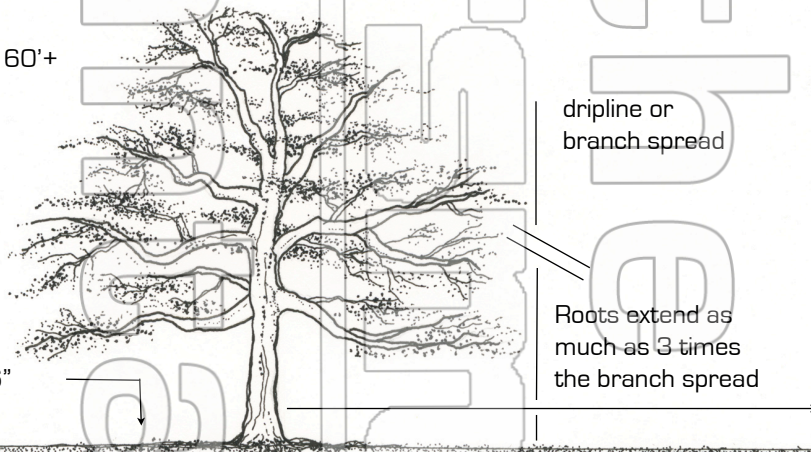
for the long term health of most trees.

## Why?

Almost all suburban tree problems are the direct result of stress from improper (not forest-like) root growing area, especially in the Chicago area's clay soils. Here 85% of all tree feeder roots inhabit the upper 4" of soil and they often extend out to three times or more the distance of the branch spread in order to get enough water and minerals.

To scale drawing of 60'+  
mature tree

85% of a tree's  
roots are in upper 4"-6"  
of soil



An organic mulch helps to provide a more forest-like soil surface because it:

- Decreases soil compaction, roots need airy loose soil.
- Eliminates damage by lawn mowers and weed whips to the delicate cambium layer located just under the bark of the trunk and roots.
- Moderates soil surface temperature, by as much as 70° F.
- Increases water holding capacity.
- Studies have proven that changing lawn area to mulched area increases tree roots by as much as 195%.
- Decreases soil pH which helps prevent the current epidemic in Oaks, and other species, called chlorosis. Chlorosis is a very light green leaf.
- Decreases damage to tree roots by lawn weed killers.

arborSmith abstracts  
practical solutions to common tree problems

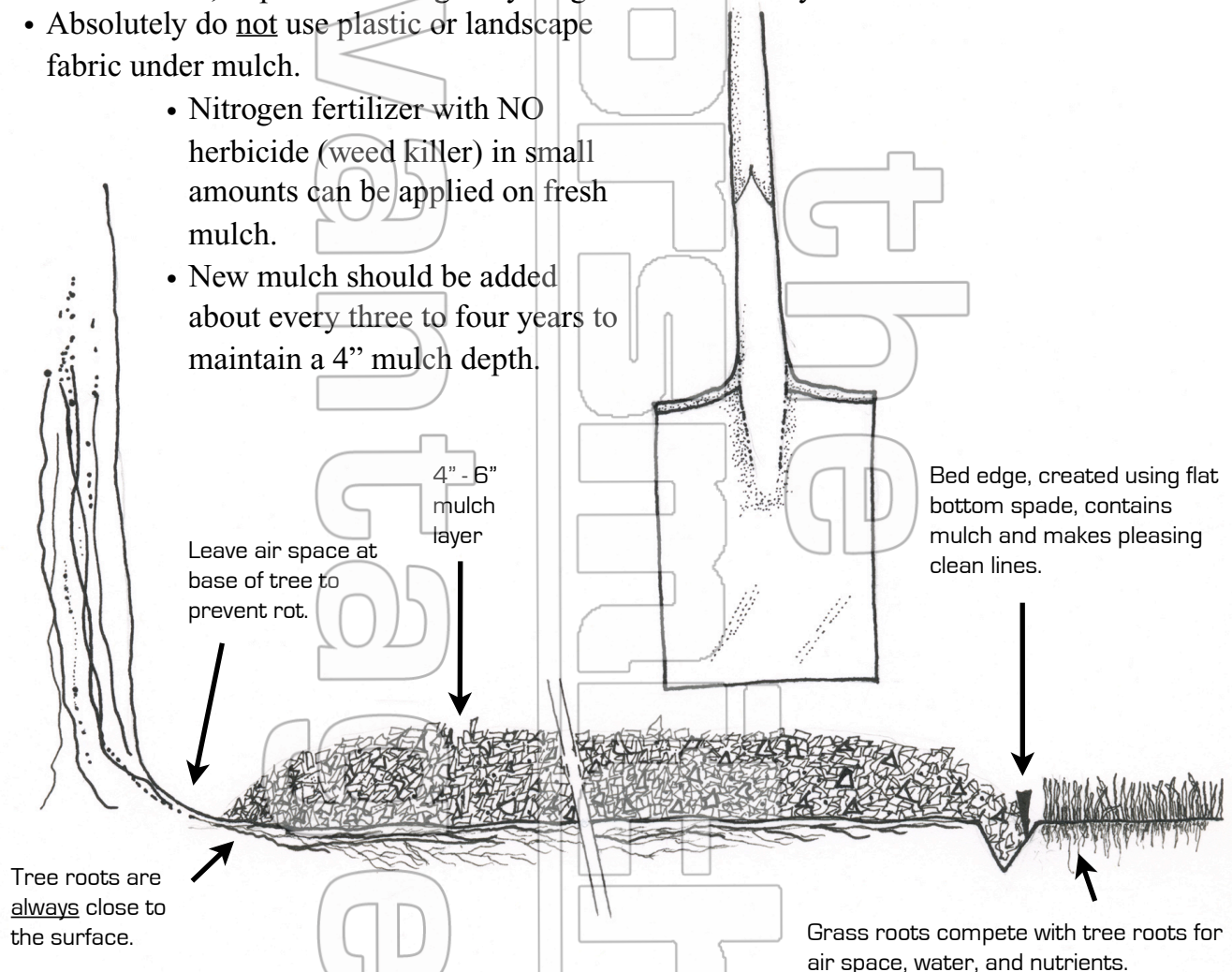
# How?

Mass or group trees and shrubs together and separate from grass.

Replace grass with 4" to 6" of organic mulch from the trunk out to at least the edge of branch spread or drip line.

Use any organic material: ✓ Split Bark ✓ Bark Chunks ✓ Cocoa Beans (*harmful to dogs*)  
✓ Leaf Compost ✓ Arborist Wood Chips

- Removing grass prior to mulching is not necessary
- Edges should be established for cleaner lines.
- Weed control should be done with Glyphosate (Formula previously named Round-up) Weed Killer ONLY, to prevent damage to young tree roots. Always follow manufacturers labels!
- Absolutely do not use plastic or landscape fabric under mulch.
  - Nitrogen fertilizer with NO herbicide (weed killer) in small amounts can be applied on fresh mulch.
  - New mulch should be added about every three to four years to maintain a 4" mulch depth.



## How will it look?

A visit to the Chicago Botanic Gardens in Glencoe, IL would clearly demonstrate the pleasing effect of mulching. While there you will notice that all tree and shrub plantings are separated from lawn areas.