

# Bark can be both decorative and useful

Readily available in most areas at reasonable prices, bark is most commonly found in three cubic foot bags weighing 40-50 pounds.

Bark products fall into three general categories — decorative bark, base (mulch) bark and soil conditioner.

Decorative bark is a product in which particle size is over 1/4 inch without cambium or wood.

Soil conditioner is a product in which 90 percent of the particle size is 1/4 inch or less.

Base or mulch bark is any product not meeting the restriction on particle size of the two preceding categories but with a maximum of 10 percent wood fiber content.

Bark is thus a most versatile material for use by the gardener from early spring to late fall.

Due to the gradation in particle size, the species from which it came and the variable treatment given it prior to marketing, bark may be successfully used for improving soil mixes. It can also be used for adding organic matter to the soil, erosion control, decorative ground cover, mulching for moisture conservation, weed control, cold protection and water absorption.

Decorative bark is often referred to as nuggets, mini-nuggets or chips. Decorative bark is suitable for use in most

plantings, in divider areas, around trees, in walkways and in ornamental or large containers. Ornamental bark can be applied at any time of the year without loss of its decorative value.

Efficient and effective use of decorative bark is based on utilization of sufficient material. Decorative bark should be spread 2 to 3 inches deep over a 3-4 inch layer of base bark to insure satisfactory decorative effect.

The base mulch holds the decorative bark in place and provides the additional benefits of moisture conservation, weed control, temperature moderation and erosion control.

Bark is a superior product to use in preparing a backfill mixture for planting trees and shrubs.

It is ideal for working into seedbeds for new lawns (or top dressing old lawns) and widely used in potting soils and container grown nursery stock.

Bark provides a longer lasting organic material than the other organic materials that have commonly been used through the years. It also costs less.

Base (or mulch) bark is the most widely used bark product and justifies its popularity by providing a multitude of benefits.

Applied as a mulch 4 to 6 inches in depth, it allows rain to penetrate the soil with a minimum run off and at the same time reduces evaporation from the soil.

Due to its excellent insulation properties, it lowers soil temperature in the late spring and early summer and helps retain soil heat in late fall and early winter.

This permits a longer period of time for optimum root growth and is especially beneficial to trees and shrubs during the first three years after planting.

Bark mulches are very effective in controlling erosion on slopes. It provides an attractive ground cover for beds while they are developing. Decomposition of bark is slow but each year additions should be made to maintain the proper depth and appearance. As the bark decomposes, the bottom layer becomes humus and is added to the top soil in a natural way.

Thus, over a period of years there is the additional bonus of soil enrichment in addition to the many other benefits of using bark mulch.

In many metropolitan areas, the use of bark has reached the point where it is the leading organic material used in horticultural projects. In all markets the amount of bark sold continues to increase dramatically each year.

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