

## “M” IS FOR MULCH

by Jolene Adams

How do you like it, how do you like it - - Hot, **HOT**, **HOT**? So they sing - but roses do Not, **NOT**, **NOT**!!

Roses like a gentle warmth on their feet - they can wiggle their rootlets and push through the good, fluffy garden soil you've given them when the soil is nicely warmed to around 70 - 75 degrees F. But above that, they slow down. That's too warm for their tootsies.

Dense canopies of bushes and shrubs will keep the ground cool - that's why the clever rosarian sits in the shade of a tree on these warm summer days. But roses can't crawl over to the shade to keep cool! And they want to keep their leaves 'out there' catching those rays to make food for their growth. They just want you to cool off the rose beds.

The best way for you to do this is to put a blanket on the bed! **WHAT???** A blanket? Yes - of mulch! A nice 3 - 4 inch thick blanket of mulch is

1. fluffy - so air goes through it,
2. leaks - so water goes through it,
3. dense enough so most seeds don't sprout under it,
4. and because it is in contact with the soil - it traps moisture that is trying to evaporate up and holds the moisture against the surface of the rose bed so the roots and gravity can suck it back down. It actually keeps the soil cooler than the surrounding air.

Mulch can be anything that is bio-degradable and looks good. Shredded bark, very small bark chips, pine needles, old hay or straw, dry manures and composts, cocoa

shells, peanut shells, cotton seed meal, etc. If it is too lightweight it might blow around in the wind, so weight it down with something heavier like shredded bark or chopped straw.

Mulch can also be cinders, crushed rock, crushed shells, shredded paper, sheets of newsprint with an organic topping, whatever.

Weed first, water, sprinkle on a pre-emergent to kill weed seeds, spread out the mulch so it covers evenly, leaving a small "air donut" around the trunk so it stays dry, and leave it on forever. It will slowly decompose so next year you can add more. It is all dead material so fungii won't want to live on it, it also acts as an insulator and keeps the top of the soil from freezing in our brief cold spells in winter.

## MEASURING FOR MULCH

1. Determine the square footage to be covered (width of the rose bed x length).
2. Convert the depth of mulch to be applied to a fraction of a foot, then to a decimal. I.e., 3" of mulch =  $3/12 = 0.25$ , or 4" of mulch =  $4/12 = 0.33$ .
3. Multiply the decimal by the square footage to find the cubic feet needed. For a bed that is 10' long and 3' wide, covered with 4" of mulch you would get  $0.33 \times (10 \times 3) = 9.9$  cubic feet.
4. Divide the cubic feet by 27 (there are 27 cubic feet in a cubic yard) to determine the bulk amount of mulch needed:  $9.9/27 = 0.37$  or about  $1/3$  a

cubic yard of mulch.

Simple! Thrifty! Your roses will be so-o-o  
happy!