

Mulch Volcanoes Can Kill Your Trees!

The Chester Borough Shade Tree Commission would like you to take a look at the mulch around your trees and see if you have “volcanoes” around the base. Mulch volcanoes are mounds of mulch in the shape of a volcano that surround the tree. If you do, *please remove them*. While a 2 to 3 inch layer of mulch under your trees protects the roots, no mulch should touch the base of the tree. There should be a 3 inch ring of dirt visible next to the trunk.

Many times, landscapers will edge the circle of mulch under your trees and throw this soil/grass mixture onto the old mulch before adding new mulch. This technique is especially harmful because it buries the crown of the tree. Tree trunks naturally flare out at the base. If you don't see the flare that means your tree is being suffocated! Over time, the improper mulching can stress the tree, making it more susceptible to insect and disease attack. In time, it can kill the tree. It also makes an ideal home for rodents, who will damage the bark and kill the tree.

Now is the perfect time to eliminate those piles of mulch. You can spread the mounds out to cover more of the area under the tree, or you can remove the extra mulch and use it on your flower beds. This way, you can help your trees and save some money on mulch at the same time. Once your trees are properly mulched, do not use string-trimmers (“weed whackers”) around the base of the tree. String-trimmers will damage the bark and the growing layer beneath the bark and kill the tree.

If you would like more information on proper mulching, go to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension's website www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs and look for Fact Sheet 099 “Problems with Over-mulching Trees and Shrubs” and Fact Sheet 122 “Tree Problems Caused by People in the Suburban Landscape.” You can also contact the Chester Borough Shade Tree Commission at shadetree@chesterborough.org