

**-Mulch Pamphlet**

**-Invasive Plants Pamphlet**

**-Conifer Trees Pamphlet**

# MULCH, MULCH, AND MULCH AGAIN!

## What is mulch?

Mulch can refer to any type of non-living ground cover. Here, we are specifically talking about wood chips.

Arguably, there is nothing better you can do for your trees than mulch them. Proper mulching helps your tree get enough water during dry summer months, keeps away grass and weeds that compete with your tree, protects your tree from damage by lawn mowers and weed whackers (you don't need to get so close!), and breaks down slowly over time to feed your tree. It's a simple way to keep your trees healthy and to give your yard a well-cared for look.

## WHAT TYPE OF MULCH SHOULD I USE FOR MY TREES?

There are a few types of mulch, and some are better than others.

**Arborist wood chips** are the best for mulching trees and shrubs. Arborist wood chips come from older trees' pruned branches and stems. They include both green parts (leaves) and brown (woody) parts. They have some large and some small pieces. The mix of green and brown is a great combination, as the green parts break down quickly to add nutrients to the soil, the brown woody parts break down more slowly over 1-3 years. Arborist wood chips do the best job of holding water in the soil, keeping soil at the right temperature, and controlling weeds.



**Large wood chips** are more uniform in nature and do not have any green (leaf) material. These chips have been processed. However, because they are large in size (ideally at least an inch long) they shouldn't break down too quickly and will still help prevent weeds and hold in water. These chips are second best for your tree if you cannot get arborist wood chips.

Don't confuse **beauty bark** for wood chips. It's a woody material that is very small, uniform, and contains no green (leaf) parts. Beauty bark breaks down very quickly, meaning it must be replaced often. Some beauty bark is dyed (red is common). This dye is not something you want in your soil or local water ways - which is where the dye will go as the bark quickly breaks down. Avoid beauty bark in your yard.

## HOW DO I MULCH A TREE CORRECTLY?

**Weed first:** Removing grass and any plants from around the base of your tree is a simple way to keep a tree healthy and protect it from weed whacker damage. Grass and plants compete with trees, absorbing water and nutrients from the soil. Once you've removed the grass and plants, lay down a 2- to 4-inch thick layer of mulch to hold soil moisture, control weeds, and protect the soil from extreme summer and winter temperatures.

**Donuts, please:** Spread mulch around the base of your tree or shrub. Keep the mulch in a donut shape by staying a hands-width away from the trunk. Mulch that is touching the trunk leads to decay which over time can kill your tree and cause it to fall over.



**Avoid Mulch Volcanos:** Mulch volcanos are created when you pile mulch high around the trunk of a tree or shrub. You see it often in commercial landscapes, but it should not be repeated in your yard! Piling mulch against the trunk of a tree leads to a host of problems including disease, rot, and potentially tree death.



### FOR MORE GUIDANCE ON MULCHING:

**Trees for City of Seattle (video)** - [seattle.gov/trees/mulch.html](https://seattle.gov/trees/mulch.html)

**King County** - [kingcounty.gov](https://kingcounty.gov), search for "go native mulch"

**Washington State University** - [gardening.wsu.edu](https://gardening.wsu.edu), search "compost mulch"

### FOR GETTING MULCH:

**Chip Drop** - [getchipdrop.com](https://getchipdrop.com)



Local Food  
Healthy Forests  
Clean Water  
Better Ground

# WHAT IS AN INVASIVE PLANT ?

**“Invasive plant”** is a term for a plant that has become a weed pest: a plant which grows quickly and aggressively, spreads easily, and forces out other plants. The most aggressive weeds can easily grow among existing healthy plants. Invasive plants are bad news: they are difficult to control and can move from one area to another to take over a whole landscape. Many non-native plants can become invasive and threaten our natural open spaces and forested parks. Here are some top “offenders” to look out for and control.

## INVASIVE VINES: English Ivy and Clematis



*Clematis*

*Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program*



*Ivy*

English ivy and clematis are quick growing climbing plants that can take over a tree in no time. Both can kill large trees by weighing down branches and intercepting water and light. Both spread easily by seed: clematis by wind and ivy by birds. Left alone, ivy can take over large areas killing all other plants and often creating homes for rats.

## MANAGING INVASIVE VINES

If ivy or clematis is growing up a tree, creating “life-saver” or “survival rings” is the first step to save your tree and reduce the number of ivy seeds. Here’s how.

- 1 Start by cutting all vines at shoulder height, then again at the bottom of the tree.
- 2 Remove the cut sections of the ivy from the trunk.
- 3 Do not attempt to pull vines above out of the tree; they will wither and die on their own and pulling them down from high branches can be dangerous and may damage the tree.
- 4 Dig out the vine roots in a radius that is at least 5 feet away from the tree
- 5 Pulled vines should be disposed of in your curb side yard waste bin.



Removing ivy and clematis by hand is the most effective method of controlling these aggressive weeds. Use of herbicides to control these vines is not recommended and should only be done by an experienced professional.

## DID YOU KNOW THERE ARE INVASIVE TREES?

You know about invasive weeds like ivy and blackberry, but did you know that there are invasive trees too? They are more common than you may think in yards and communities. After all, they are often easy to grow and have likely spread from other yards and landscapes. The problem is they do a fabulous job of growing in places that we don’t want them to grow in, including forested natural areas where they shade out native vegetation and make it virtually impossible for other plants to grow. Birds are often the culprit for moving these trees around, feasting on abundant berries and seeds and carrying them to nearby yards.

Here, we will focus on two of the worst offenders: holly and laurel.



Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program

*Holly*



Photo: King County Noxious Weed Program

*Laurel*

Holly and laurel can spread easily and are difficult to kill. If holly and laurel are only cut back, they will re-sprout from stumps. Both can grow in heavy shade and produce fruits that are highly attractive to birds.

## MANAGING INVASIVE TREES

Small tree seedlings can be pulled by hand or dug out with hand tools. The key to success is to remove all roots so the invasive tree doesn't re-sprout

When removing a larger invasive tree, it is still important to remove the roots which can be done by digging them out with a shovel or other hand tools. If you don't remove the roots the tree will quickly regrow multiple new stems, making the problem much worse.

For especially large trees, consider hiring a professional to do this work. Refer to the Hiring of a Professional topic on how and when to hire a professional for your invasive tree removal needs.

There are many other common invasive trees that are unfortunately found in our forested natural areas including: golden chain tree, horse chestnut, black locust, and some non-native maples, hawthorns, and mountain ash, among others. Consulting King County Noxious Weeds can help you identify if any trees on your property are one of these invasive trees.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ANSWERS TO YOUR INVASIVE PLANT QUESTIONS:**

**King County Noxious Weeds** - [kingcounty.gov](http://kingcounty.gov), search "noxious weeds" or call 206-477-WEED (206-477-9333)

## THE NEXT BIG INVADERS?

Did you know that many invasive plants were first well-loved yard plants? In fact, you can still buy many problematic plants at garden centers. Carefully consider the plants that you choose to plant in your yard. Watch closely for plants that spread quickly and may become invasive and damaging to other plants.

Some particularly aggressive invasive plants that have invaded natural areas include:

**Yellow archangel** – Easily identified by leaf color, creeps along the ground and can be very challenging to remove, especially among desirable plants.

*Photo: Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board*



**Vinca** – Also known as periwinkle, this groundcover grows fast but ends up acting a lot like ivy, smothering small plants in its wake.



**Italian arum** – This toxic plant to humans (skin) is becoming an issue in the region. It spreads from tubers that easily break apart, as well as from its bright orange berries eaten by birds.

*Photo: Ansel Oomen, Bugwood.org*



**Bamboo** – As attractive and functional bamboo is, it can quickly get out of control. Most spread underground with runners and can re-root easily from root fragments.

*Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org*



### FOR POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION AND PROPER DISPOSAL OF INVASIVE PLANTS:

Consult King County Noxious Weeds program at 206-477-WEED (206-477-9333).

# WHY ARE CONIFERS SO IMPORTANT ?

Ask people from around the world what comes to mind when they think of the Pacific Northwest, and large evergreen conifer trees are at the top of the list. Trees like Douglas fir, Western red cedar, and Western hemlock define this region we call home. These trees have shaped human culture for as long as humans have lived here.



Conifers are trees that have cones. Most keep their needles or leaves throughout the winter, but a few like larches and dawn redwoods change color in the fall before dropping their needles. Here are some of the reasons why large evergreen conifers are important.

## CONIFERS AND PEOPLE

- Large evergreen trees are a symbol for the region and part of what makes this area unique
- Conifers make it easier to breathe by cleaning our air
- Conifers can help people reduce stress and recover from illness
- Conifers add structure and interest to your yard
- Properly placed, conifers can provide a year-round living privacy screen
- Well-placed conifers may help cut home energy costs; shade in summer and wind buffer in winter
- Conifers are sacred trees to several Native American communities



## CONIFERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Conifers can stabilize slopes and reduce landslide risk
- They are natural birdfeeders and sustain a variety of wildlife
- Conifers can store more carbon and for longer than other trees
- Large evergreen conifers catch rain in the winter, helping water soak into the soil rather than running down our roads and washing pollutants into our lakes and rivers.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP CONIFERS?

You have a role to play in making sure your city continues to be home to these beloved and valuable trees.

- **Retain mature conifers.** Hire a qualified professional to assess and manage the health and safety of your big trees (see “Hire a Professional”)
- **Keep ivy and other invasive plants away** from conifers so your trees stay healthy (see “Invasive Plants”)
- **Never top a conifer (or any tree).** Hire an ISA Certified Arborist (see “Hire a Professional”) if you need any work done on your trees.
- **If you have room, plant a conifer.** There are a few great native conifers that can be nice additions to your yard. Consider smaller varieties of Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) such as “Excelsior” or “Hogan” for smaller spaces. Incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*) is also a good looking mid-sized conifer.



**FOR MORE HELP ON TREE SELECTION AND GETTING A LIST OF RECOMMENDED TREES.**

*contact your city or town's planning department*