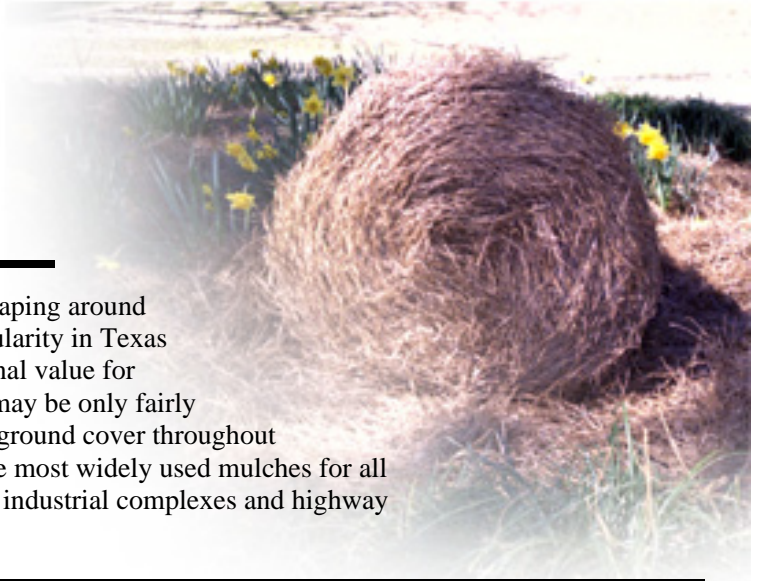


# Pine Straw as a Ground Cover Mulch

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Use of pine straw as a ground cover mulch in landscaping around trees and in flowerbeds has recently seen rising popularity in Texas because it is clean, attractive, and provides exceptional value for most landscaping situations. Pine straw popularity may be only fairly recent in Texas, but it has been a popular landscape ground cover throughout the South for the last 25 years. In fact, it is one of the most widely used mulches for all size projects ranging from residential flower beds to industrial complexes and highway landscapes.

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Pine straw is a renewable resource that can be harvested each year in Texas, and you don't have to cut down the tree to collect it. Pine trees in Texas Pineywoods naturally shed dead needles each year. These needles can be raked into bales of pine straw and used as landscape mulch.

Most mulches play some role in the protection and improvement of the site. Other dry organic mulches include pine bark, leaves, grass clippings, and peat moss. Pine straw, however, helps provide favorable growing conditions and stimulates healthy plant development because pine straw;

- Insulates tender roots from temperature extremes keeping the soils warm during cool spells and cool during warm spells,
- Conserves soil moisture by reducing water evaporation rates and moisture loss,
- Eliminates erosion caused by wind and rain-splash impact,
- Protects against soil compaction by reducing the rain impact directly on the soil surface, and
- Aids in promoting favorable soil tilth for healthy root growth.



Pine straw creates a chemically balanced bed for acid loving plants such as azaleas and roses.

Pine straw may also save homeowners time in landscape maintenance because the thick layer of straw hinders the establishment of weeds which reduces weeding time, cleanup, and edging. Pine straw may also provide an effective barrier against soil-borne diseases.

As pine straw mulch slowly breaks down, it releases organic matter. Over time, this organic matter improves soil texture by allowing air to infiltrate the soil and encouraging beneficial soil microorganisms. There is little direct nutrient value in the mulch, but a variety of physical properties give it advantages over other organic mulches:

- *Stability* - Pine needles interlock and hold together during hard rains, heavy winds, and even on landscapes with considerable slope. Pine straw doesn't float and wash out of beds like wood mulches. This helps keep walkways cleaner further reducing maintenance efforts.
- *Porosity* - Pine straw remains loose and friable and does not form a top crust like grass clippings, leaves, and some wood mulches. Loose mulch allows water to infiltrate readily into the soil for plant availability and avoids wasteful runoff of irrigation. The large air pockets, however, help prevent it from remaining excessively wet and damaging roots.
- *Weed Control* - Pine straw mulch greatly reduces weed control efforts as wood mulches have a higher tendency to import weed seed in an ideal seedbed for germination. Pine straw around trees reduces the need to use string trimmers ("weed-eaters") around the base of each tree. This reduces maintenance costs, but also prevents plant death from girdling wounds caused by the trimmer.

- *Visual Appeal* - The fine texture and uniform color of pine straw is simply more aesthetically pleasing to some users. The non-detracting, earthy facade brings out the color, contrast and texture of landscapes. Pine straw also prevents plants, flowers and fruit from becoming splashed with mud. Added annually, it gives landscapes a fresh clean and renewed appearance.
- *Longevity*- Pine straw breaks down more slowly than wood mulch, so it needs to be re-applied less often.
- *Lightweight* - Pine straw is easily handled because of its lightweight.

There are four species of southern yellow pines native to Texas. Listed in order of needle length from longest to shortest, they are: longleaf, slash, loblolly and shortleaf. Regardless of the species, each makes a first-rate mulch.

Pine straw is sold in round bales, square bales, and bags weighing from 25 to 50 pounds and yields of 3 to 6 cubic feet. Depending on customers' individual preferences, each type of bale has advantages. Some consumers prefer the portability and ease of transport afforded by smaller, more lightweight square bales. A round bale weighing approximately 40 pounds will cover about 100 square feet to a two-inch depth. Typically, new applications will require three inches of straw that settles to 1.5 inches. That equals to half a pound of straw per square foot. An additional inch per year is required to maintain the proper depth.

Compared to alternative organic mulch, pine straw is typically the least expensive option per square foot saving from \$1.60 to \$4.60 per 10 ft by 10 ft bed.



Pine straw is available in 40 pound round bales.

For example: to cover a 10 ft by 10 ft bed to a depth of 2 inches it takes:

1 round bale of pine straw

-or-

8.33 bags of pine bark mulch

-or-

5.56 bags of cypress mulch

-or-

5.56 bags of cedar mulch

-or-

8.33 bags of pine nuggets

-or-

8.33 bags of red mulch

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GO TEXAN and help build our economy by using Texas pine straw!



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