

## **Volcano Mulching can kill a Tree Slowly**

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Have you ever driven around and saw piles of mulch against a tree that resembled a volcano-shape? Some people may even think that it is more attractive like that, but it is slowly killing the tree. This article will tell you how volcano mulching affects the tree and the proper ways to mulch.

Mulch can provide many benefits to the plant such as maintaining soil moisture, cooling the plant in the summer and warming it in the winter, and keeping weeds down. Organic mulch such as leaves and pine straw break down, improving the soil's fertility, aeration, structure and drainage. Although when there is too much, it can lead to problems.

When I worked for the Navy, I stayed in a particular Navy hotel for three years in a row. I noticed these two trees, one was full-grown and the other was a sapling, and they both had a foot and a half of mulch against the trunk. The full-grown tree didn't show any obvious signs of stress, but the sapling had pale leaves and never grew in the three years I visited. I pleaded with the hotel manager to have them remove some mulch, but I was ignored despite my credentials.

Piling the mulch against the tree trunk, or volcano mulching, can have many adverse effects. It is especially deadly to new trees and shrubs. It encourages the roots to grow the wrong way, often into the mulch, as the deeper roots under the mulch suffocate.

The mulch cannot hold as much water as soil, so the tree or shrub can dry out too quickly. Even the shape can decrease the amount of water that gets to the tree. Due to the volcano shape, the water is likely to run off the mulch rather than down into it. This is more common with high carbon mulches like ground wood chips.

This might not be as much of a problem with a mature tree, but a young tree or shrub has a very small rootball which is most likely contained under the mulch layer.

For a mature tree, mulch volcanoes can lead to root rot and decay from the roots not getting enough oxygen, as well as trunk rot from the extra moisture against the trunk. Also, our furry friends, the rats, love all that mulch to burrow in. They can strip bark off the trees as they wear their teeth down, damaging the tree.

If volcano mulching doesn't kill it immediately, it will make the plant stressed. The sapling in my story showed this by having pale leaves and stunted growth.

The roots growing into the mulch can also circle the tree which can lead to the tree girdling itself, meaning it strangles itself. This can cut off the water and nutrients going into the tree.

The way to properly mulch is to place a layer of 2-3 inches after settling around a tree or shrub. Keep the mulch several inches away from the trunk. This area doesn't need to stay moist anyway since the roots are further out. If you can, extend the mulch layer to the drip line of the tree.

There is a right way to mulch, but in the shape of a volcano is not it. To learn more about various mulches, visit this page, [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic\\_mulch](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_mulch).