

Choosing and applying mulch

Homeowners may associate mulch with springtime lawn and garden care, but mulching in fall can benefit a lawn as well. According to the Morton Arboretum in Illinois, mulch protects roots against extreme temperatures, and not just those associated with summer heat waves.

Mulch is often connected with its ability to help soil retain moisture during especially warm times of the year, when mulch promotes strong roots that can help lawns and plants survive periods of extreme heat. But when applied in the fall, mulch also inhibits freezing and thawing in winter, reducing the likelihood that plants will be injured.

While applying mulch in fall can be beneficial to lawns, homeowners should first consider a few factors.

- **Timing:** The Morton Arboretum notes that mulch being applied as winter protection should not be applied too early in the fall, as doing so may delay the soil freezing process. Homeowners should wait until after a hard frost in the fall to apply winter mulch. In many places, hard frost will not appear until late fall.

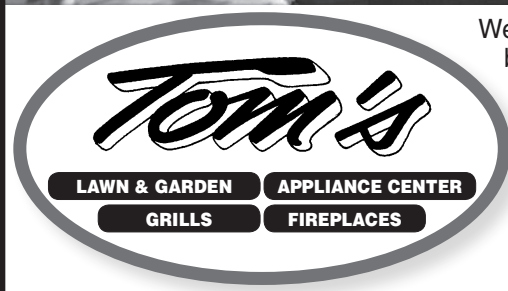
- **Texture:** The Morton Arboretum rec-

ommends medium-textured mulch. Fine particles may pack down and retain moisture that will evaporate before it reaches the plant roots. Materials that are too coarse may be incapable of holding sufficient amounts of water to benefit the soil.

- **Nutrients:** Humus is an organic component of soil that forms when leaves and other plant materials decompose. Organic mulches provide humus and decompose over time, adding nutrients into the soil. The Morton Arboretum recommends that homeowners use organic mulch that was composted or treated prior to application so any weeds, insects or microorganisms are killed.

- **Application:** Correct application of the mulch is essential. Applying too much mulch can adversely affect lawns, plants and soil. In addition, excessive application can cause decay and make lawns and plants more vulnerable to disease. Homeowners uncertain about when and how to apply mulch in the fall can consult with a lawn care professional to devise a plan that ensures their lawns and gardens hold up against winter weather.

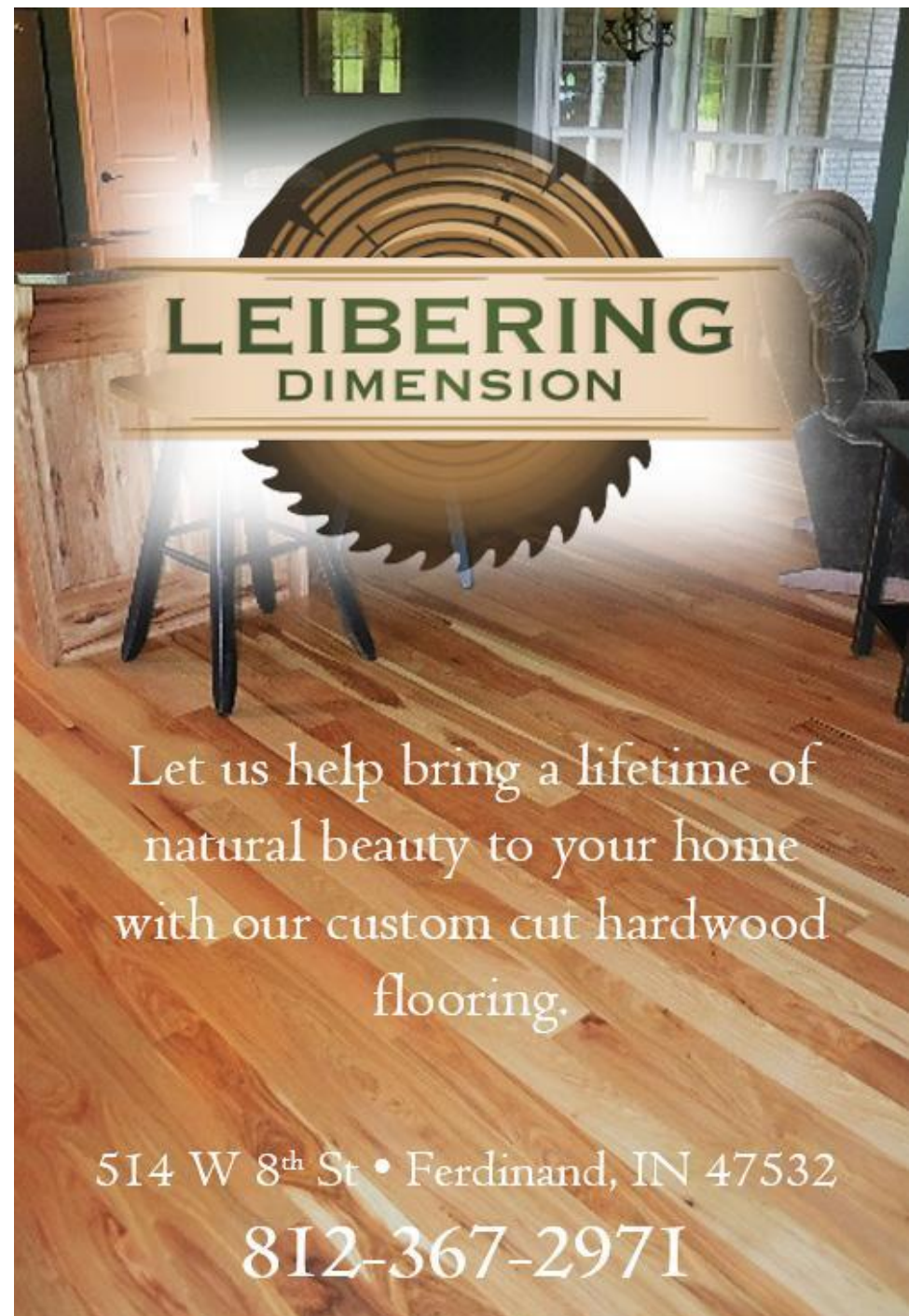
Mulch may be widely associated with spring lawn care, but applying mulch in the fall can benefit lawns and gardens as well.



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