

September 27, 2017



## **Pine Needles As Mulch**

by Summer Brasuel

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"Water, water everywhere, but nary a drop to drink" is a good analogy and sums up my thoughts when I look at all the pine needles, but have been discouraged from using because they lower the pH of the soil to acidic levels. Well, guess what? It's a myth! Green pine needles are acidic, but once they have fallen, and are dead and dry, the soil and microbes neutralize them. Go right ahead and use those pine needles as needed. They are everywhere and they are free!

We all know mulching is important. It prevents weeds, keeps soil moist and aerated, can protect plants from disease, keeps plants cooler during the hot summer months, helps prevent soil compaction, and much more. Use pine needles like other mulch. However, there are considerations to ponder before you get started:

- Pine needles decompose slowly so they do not have to be re-applied as often as other mulches. They also allow water to seep through easily.
- Use pine needle mulch in perennial beds such as strawberries and blueberries or around shrubs; wherever you have permanent plantings.
- Mulching vegetable beds that are harvested daily may not be very practical because pine needles are prickly! You might prefer lawn clippings or leaves for these kinds of beds. Cutting pine needles into small pieces with your lawn mower or other shredder may make them easier to use in a vegetable bed.
- If you want to add pine needles to your compost pile, put them in that pile that is going to take years, not months. Maybe with your larger wood chips. A good rule of thumb is not to add more than 10% pine needles to your compost pile.
- Pine needles are slippery. Use them as a weed barrier in areas that are not well traveled, like between deer fencing and planted beds. Using them on walkways or slopes could be dangerous (hikers know about this!).

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Here are some resources to learn more about mulching:

"Mulch"

[http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/other/compost\\_mulch/hgic1604.html](http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/other/compost_mulch/hgic1604.html)

"Mulches for Weed Control"

<http://extension.psu.edu/plants/gardening/fphg/pests-pesticides/weeds/mulches-for-weed-control>

The upcoming Master Gardeners public education class will be “Permaculture for the Homestead and Garden” on October 7, 9am to noon at the Government Hearing Room Bldg. C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville. Permaculture focuses on the relationships between ecological systems, landscape architecture and agriculture to minimize one's ecological impact by living in a manner to minimize waste, reduce or eliminate the dependency on fossil fuels or toxic chemicals by emulating surrounding ecosystems in form and function. Join us as we present core design principles and common practices for the home gardener or homesteader to help create regenerative, resilient, energy-efficient, low-cost, low-impact and low-maintenance spaces around your home.

October 11 Master Gardeners present “Olives: From Garden to Table,” a joint presentation with Master Food Preservers at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, Cameron Park. “Saturdays with Barry” continues October 14, 9am to 11am at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden in Placerville. A presentation on the dreaded “Starthistle” will be on Saturday, October 21 at the Government Hearing Room, Bldg C, 2850 Fairlane Ct, Placerville. Classes are free and 9am to noon unless otherwise noted.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener-e-news>. You can also find us on Facebook.