

## FACT SHEET - Pros and Cons of Rubber Mulch

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Rubber mulch has become a popular product for landscaping, sports fields, and other uses. In recent years, it has grown in popularity because it is soft and replicates the feeling of natural ground when stepped on. That has made it an excellent choice for playgrounds, as it reduces injury risks compared to wood mulch, pebbles, and other forms of ground cover.

There are a number of pros and cons that are associated with the use of rubber mulch that are worth considering.

### Pros of Rubber Mulch

**1. It requires little ongoing maintenance compared to other mulch options.**

Compared to wood mulch, rubber mulch requires very little maintenance to maintain its lustre. It is rated to last at least 10 years and does not encounter the same fading issues that are associated with other types of mulch. It still allows water to filter through it, along with fertilisers, providing a warm, moist environment which encourages plant growth.

**2. It does not attract certain pests.**

Unlike wood mulch, rubber mulch does not encounter the same issues with certain insects. There are fewer incidents of carpenter ants, termites, or ground wasps and hornets with rubber mulch as they are not attracted to the protective layer of ground cover. That reduces the need to apply pesticides to landscaping materials for homeowners, while still having protection for plants, flowers, or a playground area.

**3. It holds better during flooding events.**

If wood mulch is flooded, even with a simple garden hose, then the wood products will eventually rise to the water's surface and float away. This problem does not occur with rubber mulch products. It has a higher weight density, which allows it to withstand flooding events that may occur with greater consistency.

**4. It holds better during wind events as well.**

A common way to clean landscaping is to use a blower. When a blower is used with wood mulch, the product invariably goes everywhere, creating a bigger mess. When a blower is used with rubber mulch, even if it's just 12 inches from the surface, it does not go anywhere. Some brands of rubber mulch may move around some with high wind events. It does not experience the same scattering effect, however, making clean-up work much easier.

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### 5. It controls weeds.

Like wood mulch, rubber mulch does an excellent job of reducing weed growth. With a consistent layer, the only weeds seen over the course of a 32-week season tend to be around the edges of the area that was mulched.

### 6. It can be broken down over time.

Rubber mulch does eventually break down over time, much like any other mulch product. Microbes and certain fungal species are known to encourage the rubber to decompose, even if it gets into the soil. Even recycled rubber that came from tires that are coated in additives will break down over time because of the bacteria that is found in most soils. It takes longer to break down than organic mulches, of course, but it isn't a permanent solution.

## Cons of Rubber Mulch

### 1. It has a higher initial cost compared to other mulch products.

According to Consumer Reports, rubber mulch is more expensive. Wood mulch cost less than rubber mulch. Cost savings with rubber mulch would take almost 8 years to achieve compared to wood mulch costs.

### 2. It has a higher degree of flammability concern.

Wood and rubber mulch will both burn if exposed to an open flame. Neither mulch product will usually ignite if exposed to a lit cigarette. Rubber mulch can burn, however, if a lit match is dropped into the material. When the rubber catches fire, it burns hotter than wood does. It also burns faster and with a thicker layer of smoke. Compared to a fire with wood mulch, a rubber mulch fire is difficult to put out.

### 3. It still has some fading.

Consumer Reports also put the claims of fading by rubber mulch manufacturers to the test over the course of a full season. They reported that rubber mulch faded slightly for them, comparable to the fading experienced by the wood mulch. The claims of 10 years of colour steadfastness may not be accurate with all manufacturers.

### 4. It requires weeding by hand for maintenance work.

There may be reduced weed growth when rubber mulch is properly installed, but that does not completely eliminate weeding responsibilities. Unlike wood mulch, rubber mulch cannot be tilled into the ground at the end of a season. That means all weeding needs to be done by hand. It does not provide any soil nutrients either, which means the rubber mulch must be removed when it is time for it to be replaced.



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**5. It is difficult to remove rubber mulch from the ground.**

A weed fabric must be laid down on an area being landscaped with rubber mulch for there to be a landscaping benefit. When the rubber pieces get into the ground, it can be extremely difficult to remove them. The top layer of soil may need to be removed to get rid of all rubber pieces or the mulch may need to be plucked out by hand if it gets into the ground.

**6. It may have a toxicity to certain plants and animals.**

Recycled rubber materials tend to leach heavy metals and chemicals into the soil over time. Rubber leachate is known to kill algae and snails. Near marine environments, it can also be harmful to fish and certain plankton species. Some rubber mulches may also be high in zinc, which can then cause zinc toxicity in the plants that are part of the landscapes.

**7. It can release VOCs.**

Shredded old tyres are known to release VOCs when they get hot enough. That risk expands when this product is used on playgrounds because children often get the small rubber pieces in their mouth. Although the surface can be used to prevent injuries, the size and composition of it may cause different injuries that require treatment over time.

The pros and cons of rubber mulch show us that there are many benefits that can be experienced with this recycled product. It may have a high cost and there may be risk factors that must be avoided, but for many, this mulch is a viable, safe, and long-lasting product that spruces up the look of their property.

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