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2 Product Guidelines for Certified
3 All-Natural Horticultural Mulches
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19 Mulch & Soil Council, 7809 N. FM 179, Shallowater, TX 79363
20 TEL: 806.832.1810 / FAX: 806.832.5244 / E-mail: Info@mulchandsoilcouncil.org
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Mulch & Soil Council Uniform Product Guidelines for Certified All-Natural Horticultural Mulches

These Uniform Product Guidelines (UPG) are voluntary All-Natural Horticultural Mulch product standards and definitions. MSC members are expected to subscribe to these guidelines in principle.

Companies enrolled in the MSC Certified All-Natural Mulch Program **MUST** adopt and follow these guidelines as mandatory standards as part of the program registration and licensing requirements.

Part I. Purpose and History

The purpose of these Uniform Product Guidelines is to promote:

1. Uniform terminology and labeling that enables industry, consumers, buyers, and regulators to achieve a common understanding of All-Natural horticultural mulch products and product ingredients
2. Fair and open competition in the mulch production and sales industry
3. Standards for product performance that enable individuals to understand and choose the best product for their application.

Part II. Product Categories

Subject to the labeling requirements defined in Part III and product terms and definitions described in the Glossary of Terms (Part IV), mulch products are divided into one of the following product categories:

A. MULCH

Any product or material except peat or peat moss, that is advertised, offered for sale, or sold for primary use as a horticultural, above-ground dressing².

B. ALL-NATURAL MULCH

Any horticultural mulch product made from Forest Products, Wood Manufacturing By-Products, Tree Trimmings, and/or Yard Waste THAT DO NOT exceed 0.2% foreign matter, use mulch blends that contain any reprocessed wood, and/or contain any inorganic or unnatural paints, stains, colorants and/or chemicals.

Part: III: General Product Labeling

The MSC recognizes the following labeling requirements for all **Horticultural** mulches. The source of these requirements is specified.

- 64 1) All products must have a label that declares the product identity. (AAPFCO₃, NIST₂)
65
66 2) Product names, ingredient names, and label terminology must conform to the product
67 definitions of this guideline. (MSC₁)
68
69 3) Product names that incorporate or refer to a single specific species/material must be comprised
70 of 100% of that species/material (with a 10% investigational allowance when tested). (MSC₁)
71
72 4) Product names that list a specific species/material as “first-mentioned” among other
73 species/materials must be comprised of more than 50% of that product. (AAPFCO₃) Lack of
74 verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of mixed species/materials precludes MSC
75 certifying blended content claims.
76
77 5) Product names that list a component material or materials on other than a first-mentioned
78 basis must be comprised of at least 10% of the named material(s) and such materials shall be
79 listed in the name in the declining order of their volume content. (AAPFCO₃, MSC₁)
80
81 6) A product label shall appear on each product bag. Product labels shall contain an ingredient
82 statement that lists the individual ingredients in declining order by percent of volume or weight
83 as determined by the quantity statement. Individual ingredients must comply with accepted terms
84 in Part IV (Glossary of Terms) of these guidelines. The specific percentage of product
85 volume/weight of each listed material need not be given on the product label, unless otherwise
86 required by states. (MSC₁)
87
88 7) All product packaging and labeling shall conform to requirements of NIST Handbook 130
89 (2024 Edition) and NIST Handbook 133 (2024 Edition) and each successive edition².
90
91 8) All products shall conform to AAPFCO Official Publication No. 77 (2024)³ and each
92 successive edition as well as the standards and guidelines of the MSC, and all product claims
93 made must be independently verifiable using repeatable scientific methods.
94
95 9) Colorized Products must conform to the definitions and guidelines for the product name
96 claimed.(MSC₁)
97
98 10) Mulch or soil products shall not contain Chromated Copper Arsenate-treated (CCA) wood or
99 any ingredients whose original manufacturer recommends against grinding or mulching. (MSC₁)
100

101 **Part IV: Glossary of Terms**

- 102
103 **Aged:** exposed to weathering and/or natural decay.
104
105 **Bark:** the corky exterior covering of trees, including the cambium, with a maximum wood
106 content (interior xylem) of 15%.
107
108 **Brand or Product Name:** a specific designation applied to an individual product. (AAPFCO₃)
109
110 **Cedar Mulch:** products derived 100% from trees of the genus Thuja or Juniperus.

111

112 **Compost** - is the product manufactured through the controlled aerobic, biological decomposition
113 of biodegradable materials. The product has undergone mesophilic and thermophilic
114 temperatures, which significantly reduces the viability of pathogens and weed seeds, and
115 stabilizes the carbon, such that it is beneficial to plant growth. Compost is typically used as a soil
116 amendment, but may also contribute plant nutrients. (AAPFCO₃)

117

118 **Cypress Bark Mulch:** products derived from the genus Taxodium and a maximum wood
119 content of 15%.

120

121 **Cypress Mulch:** products derived 100% from trees of the genus Taxodium.

122

123 **Foreign Matter:** metal, plastic, glass or other man-made materials that may appear in mulch or
124 soil products from the processing/grinding of reprocessed/recycled materials or foreign matter
125 embedded in natural forest products. All-Natural Mulch products shall not contain more than
126 0.2% by volume of foreign matter.

127

128 **Forest Products:** Untreated wood and its untreated by-products generated from the harvest of
129 timber. These products may include lumber, sawdust, bark and similar materials but do not
130 include reprocessed/recycled wood from consumer or industrial products. (AAPFCO₃)

131

132 **Hardwood Bark Mulch:** products derived from deciduous hardwood trees and a maximum
133 wood content of 15%.

134

135 **Hardwood Mulch:** products derived 100% from deciduous hardwood trees and/or shrubs.

136

137 **Hemlock Bark Mulch:** products derived from the genus Tsuga and a maximum wood content of
138 15%.

139

140 **Hemlock Mulch:** products derived 100% from the genus Tsuga.

141

142 **Mulch Blends:** Bark, wood products, or reprocessed wood products containing more than one
143 genus or a mix of forest products and/or reprocessed wood that have been mechanically screened
144 and/or shredded. If reprocessed wood products are used in any portion of a blend, such use must
145 be indicated on the product ingredient label.

146

147 **Mulch:** Any product or material except peat or peat moss, that is advertised, offered for sale, or
148 sold for primary use as a horticultural, above-ground dressing; for decoration, moisture control,
149 weed control, erosion control, temperature control, or other similar purposes. (NIST₂)

150

151 **Pine Bark Mulch:** products derived from the genus Pinus and a maximum wood content of
152 15%.

153

154 **Pine Bark Nuggets:** product derived from the genus Pinus with particle size from 0.25" to 3.0"
155 in diameter and a maximum wood content of 15%.

156

157 **Pine Mulch:** products derived 100% from conifers of genus Pinus.

158

159 **Processed Mulch:** deliberately manipulated to modify or transform physical characteristics of
160 the natural state of the substance.

161

162 **Product Label:** an information panel which shall be prominently displayed on the product
163 packaging and conforms to the guidelines of MSC₁, AAPFCO₃, NIST₂ (Fair Packaging and
164 Labeling Act & Uniform Package Labeling Regulation).

165

166 **Product Name:** the primary identification of a product given by the manufacturer and printed
167 most prominently on the front of a product bag for the purpose of identifying the product to the
168 consumer.

169

170 **Raw:** in the natural state, and not prepared, modified or manipulated for use.

171

172 **Reprocessed/Recycled Wood:** wood sourced from fabricated consumer or industrial products.
173 Sources may include wood from pallets, construction and/or demolition materials that (1) have
174 not been treated with preservatives, stain or paint; (2) contain no materials whose original
175 manufacturer recommends against grinding or mulching; and (3) are not contaminated with any
176 hazardous or other regulated substances.

177 (NOTE: Forest Products processed into mulch are NOT reprocessed/recycled wood.)

178

179 **Tree Trimmings:** wood materials from powerline clearing, storm damage, urban tree
180 maintenance or other arboricultural practices that have not been mixed with other wood or non-
181 wood materials.

182

183 **Western Bark Mulch:** products derived from conifer trees common to the Western region of
184 North America with no more than 15% wood content.

185

186 **Western Bark Nuggets:** products derived from conifer trees common to the Western region of
187 North America with particle size from 0.25” to 3.00” in diameter, and a maximum wood content
188 of 15%.

189

190 **Western Mulch:** products derived 100% from conifers common to the Western region of North
191 America.

192

193 **Wood:** The interior hard fibrous (cellulosic) xylem of trees.

194

195 **Wood Mulch:** See Mulch Blend

196

197 **Wood Manufacturing By-products:** unstained, unpainted and/or untreated wood by-products,
198 tailings or residuals generated from the manufacturing of wood products such as wood moldings,
199 trusses, lumber rejects, furniture residues, and similar manufacturing facilities utilizing forest
200 products.

201

202 **Yard Waste:** wood materials including tree branches, twigs, shrubs, and other woody plant
203 materials removed during gardening, landscaping, or yard maintenance that can be ground into a
204 horticultural mulch. Yard waste used for all-natural mulch must first remove all foreign matter
205 before the grinding process.

206

207 **References:**

208 ¹MSC, The Mulch & Soil Council-Membership Approved

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210 ²NIST, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. Handbooks 130 and
211 133. NIST Handbook 130 (2024) and NIST Handbook 133 (2023) and each successive edition

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213 ³AAPFCO, American Association of Plant Food Control Officials, West Lafayette, IN. Official
214 Publication No. 77 (2024), and every subsequent edition and/or update

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