



Pine Straw as a Ground Cover Mulch

The dead needles that pine trees naturally drop make an excellent mulch and an attractive landscaping ground cover. Pine straw has recently seen rising popularity in East Texas as a ground cover mulch for landscaping around trees and in flower beds. Although this gain in popularity may be fairly recent in East Texas, pine straw has been a popular landscape ground cover for use in flower beds throughout the South since at least the 1980s.

Like any mulch, pine straw helps insulate soil from temperature extremes, moisture loss and erosion by wind and rain. A mulch such as pine straw also decreases soil compaction and promotes favorable soil conditions for healthy root growth.



Some people prefer pine straw to wood mulches for a variety of reasons:

- **Natural By-Product**—Whereas products such as cypress mulch are produced by harvesting and grinding up whole trees, pine straw is a by-product that is discarded naturally from trees.
- **Water Infiltration**—Pine needles tend to interlock, which helps keep pine straw loose and friable and prevents the formation of a top crust as with some wood mulches. Loose mulch allows water to penetrate into the soil and prevents wasteful runoff of irrigation water.
- **Weed Control**—Pine straw mulch greatly reduces the need for weed control compared to other natural mulches, which have a higher tendency to import and germinate weed seeds.
- **Stability**—Pine straw does not float and wash out of beds like other mulches. This helps keep walkways cleaner and reduces maintenance.
- **Visual Appeal**—The fine texture and uniform color of pine straw is more aesthetically pleasing to some.
- **Longevity**—Because pine straw breaks down more slowly than other natural mulches, it needs to be reapplied less frequently.

Baled Pine Straw

East Texas is known as "The Pineywoods." There are four species of southern yellow pines in East Texas. In order of needle length from longest to shortest, they are longleaf, slash, loblolly and shortleaf. All of them make good mulches. Longleaf straw is often preferred for durability but it requires more time to spread. Many East Texas homeowners have enough pine trees in their yards to rake their own straw for flower beds. For everyone else, pine straw can be purchased in both round and square bales of various sizes.

Each type of bale has advantages, depending on customers' individual preferences:

- **Square**—Some consumers prefer the portability and ease of transport afforded by smaller, more lightweight square bales.
- **Round**—Other customers prefer round bales because the product can be spread more quickly; round bales can simply be unbound, rolled out and "fluffed."

Coverage

Round bales weigh 25 to 50 pounds and yield 3 to 6 cubic feet of pine straw. New applications require about 3 inches of pine straw, which will settle to 1.5 inches, or half a pound of straw per square foot. An additional inch of pine straw may be applied each year for best appearance. A 40-pound bale will typically cover about 100 square feet (a 10- by 10-foot bed) to a 2-inch depth. For the same amount of coverage you would need:

- 8.33 bags of pine bark mulch
or
- 5.56 bags of cypress mulch
or
- 5.56 bags of cedar mulch
or
- 8.33 bags of pine nuggets
or
- 8.33 bags of red mulch

Prices will vary, but pine straw is often the least expensive of mulches. Cost savings from using pine straw may be \$1.60 to \$4.60 per 10- by 10-foot bed (or 1.6¢ to 4.6¢ per square foot).

Texas pine straw is available mainly to landscapers, but a retail market is developing and it will likely become more available at garden centers. In several Southern states the sale of pine straw is a multi-million dollar industry, so ...

GO TEXAN and help build the Texas economy by using Texas pine straw!

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