Quick Reference: Mulching at a Glance

Category	Guideline
Depth (general)	2–3 inches
Distance from stems/trunks	2–3 inches minimum clearance
Best all-purpose mulch	Arborist wood chips (aged)
Best for veggies	Straw or compost
Best for acid-lovers	Pine needles
Refresh frequency	Annually; top up by 1 inch
Best application time	Spring (after soil warms) or late autumn
Avoid	Volcano mounding, landscape fabric in beds, fresh chips on annuals

Choosing the Right Mulch

Match the mulch to the plant and purpose:

Vegetable garden	Straw, compost, grass clippings	*Breaks down quickly, feeds heavy-feeders, easy to move at season's end*
Fruit trees	Wood chips (arborist)	*Mimics forest floor; feeds mycorrhizal fungi that partner with tree roots*
Perennial beds	Shredded bark or leaves	*Stays tidy; slow decomposition; moves easily for spring division*
Acid-lovers (blueberries, azaleas)	Pine needles, aged sawdust	*Lowers pH slightly; interlocks to stay in place on slopes*
Pathways	Wood chips, gravel, crushed stone	*Suppresses weeds underfoot; gravel is permanent low-maintenance*
New planting bed	Cardboard + compost + wood chips	*Kills existing vegetation without herbicides; sheet mulching*