

## What You Should Know About Cypress Mulch!

Cypress forests are an important ecological resource that filter pollutants and serve as reservoirs for floodwater. Cypress swamps and forests provide unique and irreplaceable habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife. They are part of Louisiana's national image and support the economy through eco-tourism and outdoor recreation including fishing, boating and camping.

It's hard to believe, but some of Louisiana's majestic cypress trees may be harvested, chopped into small pieces, and sold as mulch.

Mulch is a protective covering, usually of organic matter such as leaves, straw, or peat, placed around plants to prevent the evaporation of moisture, the freezing of roots, and the growth of weeds. What is cypress mulch?

- A. The leaves collected from around cypress trees.
- B. Old dead branches that have been collected from around cypress trees.
- C. The bark of cypress trees.
- D. Entire cypress trees that have been cut down and chopped into tiny pieces and place in plastic bags to be sold in garden and hardware stores.

Early in the last century, logging was a major industry throughout the state. By the 1920s, practice of "clear-cutting" had eliminated virtually all of the old-growth areas. In recent years, many forests have begun to come back. However, not enough time has passed for the trees to become mature. Why is this important?

- A. Because old growth cypress forests are needed for shade.
- B. Because old growth cypress forests help protect us from hurricanes; they slow them down and make them less powerful.
- C. Because old growth forests look good and make us feel happy.
- D. Because old growth forests just seem like a good idea.

Do you understand the word "irony?" It means: the use of words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning, sometimes humorously. Which of the following statements best describes irony?

- A. Cypress mulch is as old as the hills.
- B. Old growth cypress forests are being cut down and shredded into tiny bits so that gardeners do not need to weed around the flowers they plant.
- C. Cypress mulch doesn't grow on trees, you know!
- D. A priest and a rabbi walk into a bar carrying two bags of mulch . . .

Many people believe that placing cypress mulch around their bushes and flowers protects them from insects, but this isn't true. Why?

- A. Termites love the smell of cypress and they flock to it.
- B. Many insects can't smell anything anyway, so they don't know where they're going.
- C. The protective ability of cypress involves "heartwood" – the older, nonliving central wood of a tree that usually is darker and harder than the younger sapwood. Only mature cypress trees have it.

D. Cypress trees don't deter insects – that's just an old wives tale.

Why do people like cypress mulch? One of the following answers is incorrect.

- A. Cypress mulch smells good.
- B. Cypress mulch is pretty to look at.
- C. They believe cypress mulch keeps insects away.
- D. They believe cypress mulch keeps birds away.

Cypress mulch originally was made strictly from the bark of the trees and was of a very fine quality. Now a bag of mulch contains mulch of very little value. What happened?

- A. Manufacturers started to mix in the limbs and tops of the cypress trees as filler.
- B. Manufacturers began to harvest trees before they could develop heartwood, the part of the tree that deters insects.
- C. Consumer demand made cypress mulch more popular, so loggers began to harvest more trees to create mulch.
- D. Consumers didn't care what they were buying. They just wanted mulch.

Why do environmentalists try to make gardeners aware of the bad side of cypress mulch? Only one of the following answers is false.

- A. Environmentalists use cypress mulch too, just like everyone else.
- B. Our cypress forests should be preserved because they provide protection from hurricanes that batter the Louisiana coast. Hurricane protection is more important than mulch.
- C. It doesn't make any sense to cut down beautiful forests just to place the shredded remnants of trees around the plants in our back yards and gardens.
- D. Cypress trees take 75 to 100 years to grow to maturity. But some loggers harvest trees that are only 15 to 20 years of age, decimating forests that are more valuable to people and animals when they are older.

There are several alternative sources for mulch. Which of the following is NOT one of those alternatives?

- A. Eucalyptus - Produced from plantation-grown trees, this mulch is naturally insect-repellent, with a rich, long-lasting color.
- B. Pine Bark - An excellent mulch with long-lasting color, it is often less expensive than purchased pine straw.
- C. Pine Straw - Available commercially by the bale, or free if you rake it yourself. Fallen leaves, especially oak leaves, make great mulch too.
- D. Promulch - Made from recycled rubber tires, this is used in some playgrounds. It stays in place even in areas that flood occasionally, comes in different colors, and does not emit toxins. It is somewhat expensive.

Answers

1. Answer: D.
2. Answer: C.

3. Answer: B. Everyone should have a healthy sense of humor, even while fighting to save cypress forests.
4. Answer: C.
5. Answer: D. Birds love cypress trees, when the trees are still standing.
6. Answer: D. Consumers very much care what they are buying, and when they learn the truth about mulch, they don't buy it.
7. Answer: A.
8. Answer: Trick question – all are good alternatives.