

S.O.G. 207

Pine Straw

Handout

Pine straw is a mulch from fallen pine needles gathered together into square “books” which are pressed into bales about two feet wide and four feet long.

There are many benefits when the pine straw is laid down in a four inch layer such as:

- Low maintenance, low cost to buy, low labor cost.
- Retains soil moisture, reducing the need for watering.
- Protects the soil from temperature extremes.
- Helps to control storm run-off and erosion, especially on steep banks and hills.
- Prevents the weed seeds from germinating (no sunlight).
 - Worms love it, and they help to improve the soil.
 - Plants become greener due to its slight acidity and nitrogen content.
 - Presents an eye-catching pleasant and uniform color that goes well with the rest of the landscaping.
 - Bird nest material. Birds along with insects and butterflies are an important part of the overall effect of the landscaping at Ole Miss.

In December and January, the fallen leaves are raked up and mulched by the mowers, then blown back into the beds if the beds are not already too deep. After this, the new pine straw can be laid down. Not all beds or areas require new pine straw every year.

Pine straw is used in shrubbery beds, open areas that do not have grass, on steep banks and hills, and in rings around trees to protect their roots from soil compaction due to foot traffic, mowers, and especially string-trimmers. During the year, it is used in new or re-configured landscaping, in landscaping that has had maintenance work done to it, or as needed.

GUIDELINES FOR LAYING DOWN PINE STRAW:

- Use CAUTION when loading and unloading pine straw bales, as some are loose. Use good lifting mechanics.
- Before laying down the pine straw, rake, blow and clean up the area or beds as needed.
- Then dig a narrow trench along the outside edge of the bed about four inches deep, keeping the flat edge of the trench to the outside of the bed. Smaller beds are trenched with a flat shovel, while larger beds are usually trenched with a motorized bed edger.
**Watch out for irrigation heads, which tend to be at bed edges. If you break one, tell your supervisor who will flag it and contact Irrigation to fix it.*
- When the trench is complete, pine straw “books” are laid down side by side and teased apart a little along the inside of the trench and then tucked down tight into the trench with a flat shovel for a crisp edge that helps to keep the pine straw in place.
- When you see valve box covers, water main covers or storm drains in the bed or area, make sure to dig a trench around them, then book and the tuck with pine straw. DO NOT cover them up!
- DO NOT pile pine straw around the stems of plants or the trunks of trees, as this could lead to stem or trunk rot at their bases. DO leave a pronounced ring at the base of the tree.
- Always remove pine straw bale strings from the bed or area.
- Pine straw bale strings, rakes, or shovels should not be on the sidewalks as they are a tripping hazard.
- When you are finished, look back over the work site for missed pine straw bale strings, and to be sure that everything has been raked, blown and cleaned for a nice clean crisp look. This cultivates greatness and a sense of excellence.