



ask

Celebrating 20 Years!
the landscape professional
Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Thank you Readers for Voting Sprigs & Twigs
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Question this Week: Hello Linda - I read your article a few weeks ago about volcano mulching which was very disturbing. You mentioned that allowing mulch to go higher up the tree stem than the flare causes small fibrous roots to start growing into the mulch. Given time, these roots actually wrap around the base of the tree and "girdle" and eventually kill the tree. We have a beautiful copper beach which is approximately 65 years old. About 13 years ago, a landscaper volcano mulched that tree. It still LOOKS healthy, but stopped producing nuts about 2-3 years ago. There are quite a few roots through the mound of mulch now. Is it possible to un-volcano mulch a tree? I would greatly appreciate some guidance because we would hate the loss of this lovely tree. Thanks, Lora

Linda's Answer:

Yes, the mulch can be removed from the base of the tree back down to the root flare (the area at the base of the tree that 'flares out' at the soil surface). Be very gentle and careful when removing the mulch. The bark of the tree will be moist and soft. Try not to nick the tree stem. The small fibrous roots growing through the mulch can be cut at the tree stem surface. Keep removing until you see the base of the tree getting wider (the root flare). If you find any roots that are growing around the tree stem, cut them off. This is a potential 'girdling root'. If you would like our tree care manager to come out and take a look, let me know. I don't know how much mulch you are talking about, but let us know if we can help in any way.

If any of your other plants on your property are 'volcano mulched', remove the mulch. Not only do plants breathe through their leaves, stems and trunks, but plants also breathe through their roots. When there is too much mulch on the soil surface, the plant suffocates. There should only be 1-3" of mulch around the base of plant without touching the plant. This rule goes for perennials, shrubs, trees, grasses, annuals-all plants. Good Luck.

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 20 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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