



ask

Celebrating 21 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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Give us a call if we can be of service!

Question this Week: *We are considering replacing mulch with gravel around the house to reduce maintenance. We understand heat build-up may be detrimental to shrubs yet the front of the house faces north and receives no sun. Which do you recommend, mulch or gravel?... Rob, Clinton*

Linda's Answer:

Dear Rob,

I am not a big fan of using stone and suggest that you stay with the mulch. Although heat build-up will not be a problem on the north side of your house, weeds will be a problem. To properly use stone as mulch, you would need to put down a layer of landscaping cloth under the stone to prevent weeds from growing up from beneath the stone. But unfortunately, that only solves half of the problem, because there are also weed seeds that fly around in the air. The airborne weed seeds will land in the stone mulch, eventually take root, grow through the landscaping cloth and will be a pain in the neck to pull out. Inevitably, the landscaping cloth gets pulled up and the garden bed looks like a mess. The weed seeds that land in mulch are much easier to pull out.



The other problem with landscaping cloth is that water is prevented or restricted from getting to the roots of the plants. All the small holes in the cloth eventually clog and prevent water penetration. The roots end up growing near the surface of the soil, directly under the cloth in order to get moisture, instead of deep in the ground. If we have a drought, which we have had the past two summers, the plants in the bed will suffer and may be lost.

Stone also tends to make its way into the lawn. So there will be maintenance needed to keep the stone in the garden bed.

If you want to cut back on the amount of mulch being added to the beds each year, plant ground covers – they will grow and eventually cover the mulch-covered ground. There are several hundred types of ground covers that work well in shade that bloom and/or are evergreen. As the ground covers grow, less mulch gets put down each year and the ground covers add more color and texture to your garden beds.

If you would like me to come out to take a look at your beds to see what ground covers would be appropriate, let me know. Thank you.

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 21 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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