



Uniform Voluntary Product Guidelines for
Horticultural Mulches, Growing Media &
Landscape Soils

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Uniform Voluntary Product Guidelines

These Uniform Voluntary Product Guidelines (UVPG) are voluntary product standards and definitions. MSC members are expected to subscribe to these guidelines in principle. However, companies enrolled in the MSC Product Certification Program **MUST** adopt these guidelines as mandatory standards as part of the program registration and licensing requirements.

Part I. Purpose and History

The purpose of these voluntary Uniform Product Guidelines is to promote:

1. Uniform terminology and labeling that enables industry, consumers, buyers, and regulators to achieve a common understanding of mulch and soil products and product ingredients
2. Fair and open competition in the mulch and soil industry
3. Standards for product performance that enable individuals to understand and choose the best product for their application.

Part II. Product Categories

Subject to the labeling requirements defined in Part III and product terms and definitions described in the Glossary of Terms (Part IV), mulch and soil products are divided into one of the following product categories:

MULCH

Any product or material except peat or peat moss, that is advertised, offered for sale, or sold for primary use as a horticultural, above-ground dressing².

HORTICULTURAL GROWING MEDIA

Any product or material advertised, offered for sale or sold for primary use as an in-container growing media with minimum product suitability determined by the test procedures defined in Appendices A & B of this document.

LANDSCAPE SOIL & SOIL AMENDMENTS

Any product or material advertised, offered for sale or sold for primary use as an in-ground soil amendment, conditioner or replacement. Landscape soils and soil amendments are suitable for use as determined by the test procedure defined in Appendix C of this document.

Part: III: General Product Labeling

The MSC recognizes the following labeling requirements for all mulches, horticultural growing media, and landscape soils/amendments. The source of these requirements is specified.

- 1) All products must have a label that declares the product identity. (AAPFCO³, NIST²)

- 2) Product names, ingredient names, soil characteristics, and label terminology must conform to the product definitions of this guideline. (MSC₁)
- 3) Product names that incorporate or refer to a single specific species/material must be comprised of 100% of that species/material (with a 10% investigational allowance when tested). (MSC₁)
- 4) Product names that list a specific species/material as “first-mentioned” among other species/materials must be comprised of more than 50% of that product. (AAPFCO₃) Lack of verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of mixed species/materials precludes MSC certifying blended content claims.
- 5) Product names that list a component material or materials on other than a first-mentioned basis must be comprised of at least 10% of the named material(s) and such materials shall be listed in the name in the declining order of their volume content. (AAPFCO₃, MSC₁)
- 6) Product names which indicate a specific animal manure by picture, graphic, drawing, or any means other than by name (i.e., cow, sheep, poultry, etc.) shall contain more than 50% of that specific animal manure as part of its total manure content by volume. (AAPFCO₃) Lack of verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of specific manure precludes MSC certifying source claims.
- 7) A product label shall appear on each product bag. Product labels shall contain an ingredient statement that lists the individual ingredients in declining order by percent of volume or weight as determined by the quantity statement. Individual ingredients must comply with accepted terms in Part IV (Glossary of Terms) of these guidelines. The specific percentage of product volume/weight of each listed material need not be given on the product label, unless otherwise required by states. (MSC₁)
- 8) All product packaging and labeling shall conform to requirements of NIST Handbook 130 (2019) and NIST Handbook 133 (2019) and each successive edition².
- 9) All products shall conform to AAPFCO Official Publication No. 72 (2019)³ and each successive edition as well as the standards and guidelines of the MSC, and all product claims made must be independently verifiable using repeatable scientific methods.
- 10) Colorized Products must conform to the definitions and guidelines for the product name claimed.(MSC₁)
- 11) Mulch or soil products shall not contain Chromated Copper Arsenate-treated (CCA) wood or any ingredients whose original manufacturer recommends against grinding or mulching. (MSC₁)

Part IV: Glossary of Terms

Aged: Exposed to weathering and/or natural decay.

Bark: The corky exterior covering of trees, including the cambium, with a maximum wood content (interior xylem) of 15%.

Biochar: A solid material obtained from thermochemical conversion of biomass in an oxygen-limited environment. (AAPFCO₃)

Brand or Product Name: A specific designation applied to an individual product. (AAPFCO₃)

Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss: Sphagnum Peat Moss harvested or mined in Canada.

Cedar Mulch: Products derived 100% from trees of the genus Thuja or juniperus.

Coir: The processed husk of coconuts (*Cocos nucifera*) consisting of pith and/or fiber (AAPFCO₃)

Compost - is the product manufactured through the controlled aerobic, biological decomposition of biodegradable materials. The product has undergone mesophilic and thermophilic temperatures, which significantly reduces the viability of pathogens and weed seeds, and stabilizes the carbon, such that it is beneficial to plant growth. Compost is typically used as a soil amendment, but may also contribute plant nutrients. (AAPFCO₃)

Container Soil/Mix: (See Potting Soil.)

Cypress Bark Mulch: products derived from the genus Taxodium and a maximum wood content of 15%.

Cypress Mulch: products derived 100% from trees of the genus Taxodium.

Digestate: Is the liquid or solid material processed through anaerobic digestion. Labeling digestate materials shall be designated by prefixing the name of the feedstock from which it is produced, i.e. cow manure digestate, biosolids digestate, etc. (AAPFCO₃)

Digested Dairy Fiber: See Digestate.

Forest Products: Untreated wood and its untreated by-products generated from the harvest of timber. These products may include lumber, sawdust, bark and similar materials but do not include reprocessed wood from fabricated consumer or industrial products. (AAPFCO₃)

Garden Soil: (See Landscape Soil.)

Hardwood Bark Mulch: products derived from deciduous hardwood trees and a maximum wood content of 15%.

Hardwood Mulch: products derived 100% from deciduous hardwood trees and/or shrubs.

Hemlock Bark Mulch: products derived from the genus *Tsuga* and a maximum wood content of 15%.

Hemlock Mulch: products derived 100% from the genus *Tsuga*.

Horticultural Growing Medium: Any substance or mixture of substances which is promoted as or is intended to function as a commercial or consumer growing medium for the managed growth of horticultural crops in containers. (AAPFCO₃)

Humus: A material for soil conditioning that is derived primarily from the decomposition of animal or vegetable matter in such manner as the origin of the material is not recognizable. Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Landscape Soil, Soil Amendment.)

Landscape Soil: A material, mix or blend for in-ground growing of plants, and made primarily from natural soils, bark, coir, digestate, forest products, peat, humus, compost, and/or manure. It may include fertilizer, pesticides, and/or additives intended as soil conditioners (e.g., perlite, vermiculite, sand, peat moss, charcoal). Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C.

Manure: Dried, pulverized, shredded, composted, or otherwise processed, manipulated, or treated animal manures are the excreta of animals together with whatever organic bedding or other materials are needed to follow good animal husbandry practices in order to maintain proper sanitary conditions, to conserve plant food elements in the excreta, and to absorb the liquid portion without the addition of other material. (AAPFCO₃) Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Soil Amendment.)

Mulch Blends: Bark, wood products, or reprocessed wood products containing more than one genus or a mix of forest products and/or reprocessed wood that have been mechanically screened and/or shredded. If reprocessed wood products are used in any portion of a blend, such use must be indicated on the product ingredient label.

Mulch: Any product or material except peat or peat moss, that is advertised, offered for sale, or sold for primary use as a horticultural, above-ground dressing; for decoration, moisture control, weed control, erosion control, temperature control, or other similar purposes. (NIST₂)

Peat: Naturally occurring material for soil conditioning formed chiefly from the decomposition of organic matter in a water-saturated environment. It is composed chiefly of organic matter that contains some nitrogen of low activity. Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Soil Amendment.).

Peat Moss: Naturally occurring material formed chiefly from the partial decomposition of moss plants and organic matter in a water-saturated environment. Suitability for use shall be

determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Potting Soil, Landscape Soil and Soil Amendment.)

Peat Moss, Sphagnum: A material obtained from a sphagnum peat deposit (bog) of which an oven dried sample contains a minimum of 66-2/3% sphagnum moss fiber by weight. Those fibers shall be stems and leaves that have recognizable fibrous and cellular structure. (AAPFCO₃) (See also, Potting Soil, Landscape Soil and Soil Amendment.)

Perlite, Horticultural: A unique volcanic aluminosilicate mineral which expands 13 times its original volume when it is heated to a temperature of approximately 1,600° F. It is commonly used as a potting mix ingredient or separately as a medium for rooting cuttings or for hydroculture.

Pine Bark Mulch: products derived from the genus Pinus and a maximum wood content of 15%.

Pine Bark Nuggets: product derived from the genus Pinus with particle size from 0.25” to 3.0” in diameter and a maximum wood content of 15%.

Pine Mulch: products derived 100% from conifers of genus Pinus.

Planting Mix: (See Landscape Soil.)

Potting Mix: (See Horticultural Growing Media)

Potting Soil/Mix, Standard: Any material for in-container growing of plants with suitability for use determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix A.

Potting Soil/Mix, Premium: Any material for in-container growing of plants, with suitability for use determined by the testing protocol described in

Potting Soil/Mix, Professional: A potting soil formula used in commercial container production businesses with documented sales to professional growers of these establishments.

Processed: Deliberately treated or manipulated to modify or transform physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of the natural state of the substance.

Product Label: An information panel which shall be prominently displayed on the product packaging and conforms to the guidelines of MSC₁, AAPFCO₃, NIST₂ and the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act.

Product Name: The primary identification of a product given by the manufacturer and printed most prominently on the front of a product bag for the purpose of identifying the product to the consumer.

Raw: In the natural state, and not prepared, modified or manipulated for use.

Reprocessed/Recycled Wood: Wood sourced from fabricated consumer or industrial products. Sources may include wood from pallets, construction and/or demolition materials that (1) have not been treated with preservatives, stain or paint; (2) contain no materials whose original manufacturer recommends against grinding or mulching; and (3) are not contaminated with any hazardous or other regulated substances.

Seed Starter: A special purpose soil product formulated for in-container growing of plants from seed with suitability for use determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix D1.

Sewage Sludge/ Biosolids: The solid precipitate, resulting from water or sewage treatment processes, that contains human waste matter. Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C and the requirements of the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 40CFR, Part 503, Table 3. (See also, Soil Amendment.)

Soil Amendment: Any substance which is intended to improve the physical characteristics of the soil, except commercial fertilizers, agricultural liming materials, unmanipulated animal manures, unmanipulated vegetable manures, pesticides and other materials exempted by regulation. (AAPFCO₃) Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C.

Soil Conditioner: (See Soil Amendment.)

Soil: Any product or material except peat or peat moss that is advertised or offered for sale, or sold for primary use as a horticultural growing media, soil amendment, and/or soil replacement. (NIST₂)

Soilless: Without naturally occurring earth soil such as topsoils, mineral soil, clay, and silt.
Stump & Root Mulch: products derived 100% from the processing of tree stumps and/or roots.

Vermiculite, Horticultural: An aluminosilicate mineral, heat-treated to form expanded or 'exfoliated' granules with very low bulk density and a laminated structure that allows for good aeration and water retention.

Top Soil: (See Landscape Soil.)

Water-holding Polymer: Polyacrylamides, polyvinyl alcohols, starches and other substances, specifically manufactured to increase water retention in soil or substrates.

Western Bark Mulch: products derived from conifer trees common to the Western region of North America with no more than 15% wood content.

Western Bark Nuggets: products derived from conifer trees common to the Western region of North America with particle size from 0.25" to 3.00" in diameter, and a maximum wood content of 15%.

Western Mulch: products derived 100% from conifers common to the Western region of North America.

Wetting Agent: A liquid or granular compound applied to horticultural mixes to improve their ability to wet, rewet and distribute water.

Wood Mulch: See Mulch Blend

Wood: The interior hard fibrous (cellulosic) xylem of trees.

References:

¹ MSC, The Mulch & Soil Council-Membership Approved

² NIST, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. Handbooks 130 and 133. NIST Handbook 130 (2019) and NIST Handbook 133 (2019) and each successive edition

³ AAPFCO, American Association of Plant Food Control Officials, West Lafayette, IN. Official Publication No. 72 (2019), and every subsequent edition and/or update