

RED = Additions

BLUE = Deletions



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

Draft

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# Mulch & Soil Council

## 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 dressing **for decoration, moisture control, weed control, erosion control, temperature control, or other similar purposes. (NIST<sub>2</sub>).**

#### HORTICULTURAL GROWING MEDIA

**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. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)**

~~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. **(MSC<sub>1</sub>)** ~~Landscaping soils and soil amendments are suitable for use as determined by the test procedure defined in Appendix C of this document.~~

## 64 Part: III: General Product Labeling

65

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

68

69 1) All products must have a label that declares the product identity. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>, NIST<sub>2</sub>)

70

71 2) Product names, ingredient names, soil characteristics, and label terminology must conform to  
72 the product definitions of this guideline. (MSC<sub>1</sub>)

73

74 3) Product names that incorporate or refer to a single specific species/material must be comprised  
75 of 100% of that species/material (with a 10% investigational allowance when tested). (MSC<sub>1</sub>)

76

77 4) Product names that list a specific species/material as “first-mentioned” among other  
78 species/materials must be comprised of more than 50% of that product. <sup>1</sup> (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>) Lack of  
79 verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of mixed species/materials precludes  
80 MSC certifying blended content claims.

81

82 5) Product names that list a component material or materials on other than a first-mentioned  
83 basis must be comprised of at least 10% of the named material(s) and such materials shall be  
84 listed in the name in the declining order of their volume content. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>, MSC<sub>1</sub>)

85

86 6) Product names which indicate a specific animal manure by picture, graphic, drawing, or any  
87 means other than by name (i.e., cow, sheep, poultry, etc.) shall contain more than 50% of that  
88 specific animal manure as part of its total manure content by volume. <sup>2</sup> (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>) Lack of  
89 verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of specific manure precludes MSC  
90 certifying source claims.

91

92 7) A product label shall appear on each product bag. Product labels shall contain an ingredient  
93 statement that lists the individual ingredients in declining order by percent of volume or weight  
94 as determined by the quantity statement. Individual ingredients must comply with accepted terms  
95 in Part IV (Glossary of Terms) of these guidelines. The specific percentage of product  
96 volume/weight of each listed material need not be given on the product label, unless otherwise  
97 required by states. (MSC<sub>1</sub>)

98

99 8) All product packaging and labeling shall conform to requirements of NIST Handbook 130  
100 (2019) and NIST Handbook 133 (2019) and each successive edition<sup>2</sup>.

101

102 9) All products shall conform to AAPFCO Official Publication No. 72 (2019)<sup>3</sup> and each  
103 successive edition as well as the standards and guidelines of the MSC, and all product claims  
104 made must be independently verifiable using repeatable scientific methods.

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<sup>1</sup> Lack of verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of mixed species/materials precludes MSC certifying blended content claims.

<sup>2</sup> Lack of verifiable method for accurately testing percentage of specific manure precludes MSC certifying source claims

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105  
106 10) Colorized Products must conform to the definitions and guidelines for the product name  
107 claimed.(MSC<sub>1</sub>)

108  
109 11) Mulch or soil products shall not contain Chromated Copper Arsenate-treated (CCA) wood or  
110 any ingredients whose original manufacturer recommends against grinding or mulching. (MSC<sub>1</sub>)  
111

112 **12) Suitability for use, classification and claims of horticultural growing media, landscape**  
113 **soils and amendments and other soil products shall be determined by the latest edition of**  
114 **the MSC GREENHOUSE & HEAVY METALS TEST PROTOCOLS for the Classification**  
115 **& Claims of Horticultural Growing Media, Landscape Soils & Amendments, and Other Soil**  
116 **Products.**

117

118

## 119 Part IV: Glossary of Terms

120

121 **Aged:** Exposed to weathering and/or natural decay.

122

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

125

126 **Biochar:** A solid material obtained from thermochemical conversion of biomass in an oxygen-  
127 limited environment. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

128

129 **Brand or Product Name:** A specific designation applied to an individual product. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

130

131 ~~**Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss: Sphagnum Peat Moss harvested or mined in Canada.**~~

132

133 **Cedar Mulch:** Products derived 100% from trees of the genus Thuja or Juniperus.

134

135 **Coir:** The processed husk of coconuts (Cocos nucifera) consisting of pith and/or fiber  
136 (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

137

138 **Compost** - is the product manufactured through the controlled aerobic, biological decomposition  
139 of biodegradable materials. The product has undergone mesophilic and thermophilic  
140 temperatures, which significantly reduces the viability of pathogens and weed seeds, and  
141 stabilizes the carbon, such that it is beneficial to plant growth. Compost is typically used as a soil  
142 amendment but may also contribute plant nutrients. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

143

144 **Container Soil/Mix:** (See Potting Soil.)

145

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

148

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

150

151 **Digestate:** Is the liquid or solid material processed through anaerobic digestion. Labeling  
152 digestate materials shall be designated by prefixing the name of the feedstock from which it is  
153 produced, i.e. cow manure digestate, biosolids digestate, etc. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

154

155 **Digested Dairy Fiber:** See Digestate.

156

157 **Foreign Matter: metal, plastic, glass or other man-made materials that may appear in**  
158 **mulch or soil products from the processing/grinding of reprocessed/recycled materials or**  
159 **foreign matter embedded in natural forest products. (MSC<sub>1</sub>)**

160

161 **Forest Products:** Untreated wood and its untreated by-products generated from the harvest of  
162 timber. These products may include lumber, sawdust, bark and similar materials but do not  
163 include reprocessed wood from fabricated consumer or industrial products. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

164

165 **Garden Soil:** (See Landscape Soil.)

166

167 **Growing Medium, Horticultural:** Any substance or mixture of substances which is promoted  
168 as or is intended to function as a commercial or consumer growing medium for the managed  
169 growth of horticultural crops in containers. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>)

170

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

173

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

175

176 **Hemlock Bark Mulch:** products derived from the genus Tsuga and a maximum wood content of  
177 15%.

178

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

180

181 **Humus:** A material for soil conditioning that is derived primarily from the decomposition of  
182 animal or vegetable matter in such manner as the origin of the material is not recognizable.

183 ~~(AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>) Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol described in~~  
184 ~~Appendix C. (See also, Landscape Soil, Soil Amendment.)~~

185

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

191

192 **Manure:** Dried, pulverized, shredded, composted, or otherwise processed, manipulated, or  
193 treated animal manures are the excreta of animals together with whatever organic bedding or  
194 other materials are needed to follow good animal husbandry practices in order to maintain proper

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195 sanitary conditions, to conserve plant food elements in the excreta, and to absorb the liquid  
196 portion without the addition of other material. (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>) Suitability for use shall be  
197 determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Soil Amendment.)  
198

199 **Mulch Blends:** Bark, wood products, or reprocessed wood products containing more than one  
200 genus or a mix of forest products and/or reprocessed wood that have been mechanically screened  
201 and/or shredded. If reprocessed wood products are used in any portion of a blend, such use must  
202 be indicated on the product ingredient label.  
203

204 **Mulch:** Any product or material except peat or peat moss, that is advertised, offered for sale, or  
205 sold for primary use as a horticultural, above-ground dressing; for decoration, moisture control,  
206 weed control, erosion control, temperature control, or other similar purposes. (NIST<sub>2</sub>)  
207

208 **Peat:** Naturally occurring material for soil conditioning formed chiefly from the decomposition  
209 of organic matter in a water-saturated environment. It is composed chiefly of organic matter that  
210 contains some nitrogen of low activity. Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing  
211 protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Soil Amendment.).  
212

213 **Peat Moss:** Naturally occurring material formed chiefly from the partial decomposition of moss  
214 plants and organic matter in a water-saturated environment. Suitability for use shall be  
215 determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix C. (See also, Potting Soil,  
216 Landscape Soil and Soil Amendment.)  
217

218 **Peat Moss, Sphagnum:** A material obtained from a sphagnum peat deposit (bog) of which an  
219 oven dried sample contains a minimum of 66-2/3% sphagnum moss fiber by weight. Those  
220 fibers shall be stems and leaves that have recognizable fibrous and cellular structure.  
221 (AAPFCO<sub>3</sub>) (See also, Potting Soil, Landscape Soil and Soil Amendment.)  
222

223 **Perlite, Horticultural:** A unique volcanic aluminosilicate mineral which expands 13 times its  
224 original volume when it is heated to a temperature of approximately 1,600° F. It is commonly  
225 used as a potting mix ingredient or separately as a medium for rooting cuttings or for  
226 hydroculture.  
227

228 **Pine Bark Mulch:** products derived from the genus Pinus and a maximum wood content of  
229 15%.  
230

231 **Pine Bark Nuggets:** product derived from the genus Pinus with particle size from 0.25” to 3.0”  
232 in diameter and a maximum wood content of 15%.  
233

234 **Pine Mulch:** products derived 100% from conifers of genus Pinus.  
235

236 **Planting Mix:** (See Landscape Soil.)  
237

238 **Potting Mix:** (See Horticultural Growing Media)  
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240 **Potting Soil/Mix, Standard:** Any ~~material~~ horticultural growing medium ~~for~~ that provides  
241 physical support for plants in containers and a means to exchange air, water and nutrients.  
242 ~~with suitability for use determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix A.~~

243  
244 **Potting Soil/Mix, Premium:** Any ~~material~~ horticultural growing medium that actively  
245 promotes the growth and/or vigor of plants in containers, provides physical support for the  
246 plants and a means to exchange air, water and nutrients. ~~for in-container growing of~~  
247 ~~plants, with suitability for use determined by the testing protocol described in in Appendix~~  
248 ~~A~~

249  
250 **Potting Soil/Mix, Professional:** A potting soil formula used in commercial container production  
251 businesses with documented sales to professional growers of these establishments.

252  
253 **Processed:** Deliberately treated or manipulated to modify or transform physical, chemical, or  
254 biological characteristics of the natural state of the substance.

255  
256 **Product Label:** An information panel which shall be prominently displayed on the product  
257 packaging and conforms to the guidelines of MSC<sup>1</sup>, AAPFCO<sup>3</sup>, NIST<sup>2</sup>, ~~and~~ the Fair Packaging  
258 and Labeling Act, **and the Uniform Packaging & Labeling Regulations.**

259  
260 **Product Name:** The primary identification of a product given by the manufacturer and printed  
261 most prominently on the front of a product bag for the purpose of identifying the product to the  
262 consumer.

263  
264 **Raw:** In the natural state, and not prepared, modified or manipulated for use.

265  
266 **Reprocessed/Recycled Wood:** Wood sourced from fabricated consumer or industrial products.  
267 Sources may include wood from pallets, construction and/or demolition materials that (1) have  
268 not been treated with preservatives, stain or paint; (2) contain no materials whose original  
269 manufacturer recommends against grinding or mulching; and (3) are not contaminated with any  
270 hazardous or other regulated substances.

271  
272 **Seed Starter:** A special purpose soil product formulated for ~~in-container~~ growing of plants  
273 from seed ~~with suitability for use determined by the testing protocol described in Appendix~~  
274 ~~D1.~~

275  
276 **Sewage Sludge/ Biosolids:** The solid precipitate, resulting from water or sewage treatment  
277 processes, that contains human waste matter. Suitability for use shall be determined by the  
278 testing protocol described in Appendix C and the requirements of the United States  
279 Environmental Protection Agency in 40CFR, Part 503, Table 3. (See also, Soil Amendment.)

280  
281 **Soil Amendment:** Any substance which is intended to improve the physical characteristics of  
282 the soil, except commercial fertilizers, agricultural liming materials, unmanipulated animal  
283 manures, unmanipulated vegetable manures, pesticides and other materials exempted by  
284 regulation. (AAPFCO<sup>3</sup>) ~~Suitability for use shall be determined by the testing protocol~~  
285 ~~described in Appendix C.~~

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**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. (NIST<sup>2</sup>)

**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 **plant** 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.

**Topsoil:** (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 absorb, hold and/or distribute water.

**Wood Mulch:** See Mulch Blend

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

**References:**

<sup>1</sup> MSC, The Mulch & Soil Council-Membership Approved

<sup>2</sup> NIST, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD. Handbooks 130 and 133. NIST Handbook 130 (2025) and NIST Handbook 133 (2025) and each successive edition

<sup>3</sup> AAPFCO, American Association of Plant Food Control Officials, West Lafayette, IN. **Official Publication No. 77 (2025)**, and every subsequent edition and/or update