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Conquering Mulch Mountain...Who Really Won?

Mon, 03/26/2012 - 13:43 -- julieta

I love mulch.

I'm one of those odd people who gets ridiculously excited about the prospect of freshly spread mulch.

I love ordering it. ?Double ground hardwood, please?--even though, after all of these years of using the same local company?I still can't understand the super nice owner's extreme southern drawl.

Sometimes, I wonder exactly what I've agreed to after talking with him.

The kids love mulch. As soon as the truck dumps the mulch, the kids fly outside to Mulch Mountain?where they climb, slide, dig, and generally wreck havoc on the mulch and each other.

Our oldest son is not quite as enthusiastic. He was summoned home from college this weekend to help spread mulch. Well, actually, he's the fill-the-wheelbarrow-and-dump guy.

Don't feel too sorry for him. He was well-fed. And he earned much praise, because he really makes the process so much easier.

I love the aesthetics of mulch. So clean, so fresh. I love the smell of mulch, although my 6-year-old said it smelled like something died outside. More importantly, I love the organic benefits of mulch. Water retention. Weed control. Increased soil health as the mulch decomposes.

The only glitch with mulching is...perennials. Everywhere. This is the problem if you wait too late to spread mulch. You can kiss the rake goodbye.



[1]

It's hand-mulching time.

Yes, for two straight days, I filled tubs with mulch and carefully, carefully, dressed the perennials by hand.

Two days. From early morning until last light?which is now about 8 p.m.?I knelt, squatted, plied, and bent in awkward positions to mulch my babies.

And I hurt.

A lot.

But it was worth it.



[2]

Look! Look! See what I did! (Please pretend you don't see the dandelion in the corner. Thank you.)



[3]

Even Sammy enjoys the new mulch.



[4]

Now, I know I'm not the only gardener in the throws of heavy lifting, bending, and stretching in the efforts to ready the garden for the season ahead. I just hope you are more fit and less achy than I am. Perhaps you even stretch and such before you begin gardening each day.

However, in case you, too, are feeling less than spry after your gardening work, I have a treat for you.

It will make you happy.

It's a bath.

I rarely take a bath. The idea of a bath is delicious. Soaking, peacefully, in a steamy tub sounds like bliss.

However, I'm a mom.

The minute I contemplate a bath, everyone needs something.

Right. Now.

?MOOOOM!?

You probably are too familiar with this scenario. It just isn't worth it.

Most of the time.

As sore as I am, though, a bath is a medical necessity.

So, my friends, I'm sharing with you a lovely recipe for a bath, borrowed from Amy Stewart's charming book, *From the Ground Up: The Story of a First Garden*. Have you read her memoir? If not, I highly recommend you take it with you to the tub, read about her adventures as a first-time gardener, and just soak. Both your body and your spirit will be nicely rejuvenated after your bath, and you'll be ready for another day in the garden.



[5]

Gardener's Bath

1 cup oatmeal

¼ cup baking soda

¼ cup powdered whole-milk

Herbs (the recipe calls for dried herbs, but I've cut fresh lavender, rosemary, and lemon balm to add to the bath. Mint, comfrey, rose petals, and chamomile are also options.)

Blend ingredients together in a food processor or blender until you have a fine powder. The oats ease itchy skin, and the fat in whole-milk powder moisturizes, while the lactic acid gently exfoliates. Baking soda helps

soften the skin and also relieves itch.

In her book, Amy sprinkles the blend directly in the bath. Instead, you could also minimize the post-bath clean-up by putting the blend in a fine mesh bag, such as a lingerie laundry bag, and letting it soak in the tub under the faucet to release the aroma.

Relax and enjoy!

XO ~

Julie

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