



The Mulch and Soil Council strives to strengthen the industry by defining and certifying quality products.

The Mulch and Soil Council: Ensuring Quality

In 1972, six mulch-producing companies literally passed a hat to collect a few dollars. The money they gathered went to the creation of what is now the 85-member Mulch and Soil Council based in the Washington, D.C. suburb of Manassas, Va.

The council is a trade association for processors of horticultural mulches, consumer potting soils, and commercial growing media. Today, it is working to strengthen the industry by defining and certifying quality products and promoting an open marketplace for producers.

"The most critical issue we face is consumer confidence," says Mulch and Soil Council Executive Director Robert C. LaGasse. He explains that because mulch is a commodity product, consumer certainty is essential to maintaining marketplace demand. "If we lose customer confidence in the product, we will lose our business," LaGasse states.

The council is working to maintain this confidence in a variety of ways, including offering a voluntary product-quality certification program. LaGasse explains that certification helps end-users and merchants identify those products that conform to industry-defined standards of quality. "In order to maintain consumer confidence, we have to provide consumers with a means that they can be assured the product meets industry standards, and the label is truthful," LaGasse states. "That is what certification does."

The industry recently faced claims of poor product quality that have heightened consumer awareness. This past year a rumor circulated that trees downed by Hurricane Katrina were infected with Formosan termites. Word spread that the infected trees were then turned into mulch and shipped across the country. LaGasse states the claim was a hoax, but it generated calls from retailers and end-users alike. In addition, the industry is also facing the fact that some recycled wood mulch has contained Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA), a wood preservative that contains high levels of arsenic.

Lighten the Load

Coloring mulch requires three major elements: mulch, water, and colorant.



Water is the vehicle that carries the colorant to coat the substrate or mulch. **"Based on the substrate and the use of concentrated colorants, a minimum quantity of water is required to give proper coverage,"** explains David Roller, colorant systems manager. The patented Colorbiotics™ equipment technology uses air atomization and a manifold design that lowers the amount of water required by 30 to 40 percent compared to other equipment designs. "You may say, 'so what, water is cheap,'" Roller says. "But water is weight." Reducing the product's weight affects the transportation costs of either bagged or bulk mulch.



Continued on page 3

Colorbiotics Technical Service: A Tool You Can Use

Colorant Systems Manager David Roller offers a simple metaphor to describe his team's role at Colorbiotics™. "We are a tool in the toolbox," Roller explains.

The Colorbiotics technical services department is a specialized tool that assists customers with new equipment setup, maintenance, and operation, and provides ongoing training.

Colorbiotics COO Brent Lester says the department is a tool that customers have consistently relied upon. "Our customers view us as a business partner because we support our products with excellent service," Lester says.

This service includes providing expert advice on how to integrate colorant equipment into an operation, prior to purchasing a system. Once a customer chooses Colorbiotics equipment, technical service experts provide on-site setup assistance. Colorbiotics also provides a three-phase equipment training program that covers safety, functionality, and maintenance. Roller says Colorbiotics understands that as time goes on, personnel or operations may change. To help customers through these adjustments, Colorbiotics territory



The Colorbiotics technical services department helps with new equipment setup, maintenance, and operation assistance.

managers or technical service experts also provide thorough follow-up training.

"Our customers see value in our service because we are in the trenches with them, helping them be more profitable," Lester says.

The technical services team often assists customers in less visible ways. The team provides input on product development to ensure new or improved colorants or equipment work well with established processes. "Our input is based on experience and our work with customers," Roller says

Lester notes that Colorbiotics has invested in its service by hiring more people and is looking at continuing to meet customer service needs with additional personnel.



Kenny VanDerPol is one member of the technical services department who assists customers.

"Our customers expect us to understand their business and their time constraints and they expect us to be a valuable resource," COO Brent Lester says. "We don't want to work with our customers for just a month or a year. We want to work with our customers for years to come."

Value-Added Selling: Part II

In today's market, customers want individual solutions. A one-size-fits-all approach rarely works. A company must match its products and services to individual customer needs.

Jones Development Group Principal Randy Jones says that colored-mulch producers should identify their core customers. "Ask yourself, 'around whom did we build our products and services,' and focus on those customers," states Jones, whose company is a leadership, management, marketing, and sales consulting firm located in Ames, Iowa.

In addition, **producers should understand their customers' individual needs.** This begins by doing a little homework.

If a customer is a nursery, garden center, or landscape designer, Jones suggests visiting their Web site or reviewing their advertising to gather information. The next step is actually sitting down with the customer to ask about their operation. Jones suggests asking open-ended questions. For example, a producer may ask about the end-user's color preferences or delivery methods.

The next step is a visual inspection of the customer's operation. **"Ask them for a tour so you understand their operation and how you can fit into or assist that operation,"** he says.

He explains that unlike a "product peddler," a value-added seller strives to understand what is unique about the customer and his or her business, and then determines if there is a product or service that meets those needs.

"It may prevent you from making a mistake by recommending something that won't work or that the customer is set against," Jones says.



Mulch Benefits Vegetation, Landscape

More than just decoration, mulch helps preserve consumers' investment in gardens and landscapes. Mulch retains moisture in the soil while also controlling erosion, soil temperature, and weed growth.

What's more, organic mulch breaks down and forms a humus that can be tilled into the soil to improve its air- and moisture-holding content. A quality mulch improves the environment in all phases of its use — even after it's no longer useful as mulch.

Founded in 1972, the Mulch and Soil Council helps consumers buy quality mulch. Certified producers agree to routine product testing and labeling review.

"The product label must conform to industry-accepted nomenclature," says Robert C. LaGasse, executive director of the Mulch and Soil Council. When you buy "mini nuggets" it means the same to all producers, and consumers won't be surprised. The council also tests:

- **Content** — the product is what it says on the label.
- **Contamination** — such as Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA).
- **Volume** — the full quantity is in the bag.
- **Claim** — label claims must be supported by independent research.

To ensure unbiased testing, volunteers pull samples from the marketplace at least twice each season. If a mulch sample fails a test, the production plant must pass a site inspection or lose its certification.

Benefits of color-enhanced mulch

Many producers colorize mulch because of its longevity and uniform appearance. Even with natural products, producers may colorize mulch to match the competitive color longevity of recycled wood. The Mulch and Soil Council is researching methods to define and establish a standard for colorant. This will enhance consumer acceptance and confidence of mulch colorants that meet these standards.

INSIGHT

INSIGHT is published by Colorbiotics™, and is provided courtesy of Colorbiotics Territory Managers. To change your address, send your old address label, along with your new address, to Colorbiotics Publications, P.O. Box 667, Ames, IA 50010.



Colorbiotics and the Colorbiotics logo are trademarks of Becker Underwood in the U.S. and / or other countries. © 2007 Colorbiotics. All Rights Reserved.

Colored Mulches — Quality and Performance

Color-enhanced mulches are an easy and effective way to improve the appearance of a landscape. The benefits of mulch — moisture retention, erosion control, and weed control, just to name a few — are widely recognized by landscapers and homeowners. End-users are also aware of safety issues and want a product they can rely on to be safe for their vegetation, their pets, and their family.

Is colored mulch safe?

Unfortunately, consumers cannot determine on their own whether colorized mulch is safe and they rely on the producer to provide some assurance. Mulch producers can help ensure the quality of their product by starting with quality-tested colorants from Colorbiotics and participating in industry-accepted certification.

The Mulch and Soil Council — an independent nonprofit group — promotes product quality through voluntary national product certification. The certification program provides retailers and consumers with a means of determining which products conform to industry-accepted labeling, that is, which product labels truthfully describe the product being sold.

Certification is for everybody

Certification is a mulch producer's, and a



Mulch helps plants grow better by inhibiting weed growth and preventing weeds from breaking through the soil.

customer's, best, independent means of demonstrating a commitment to quality production and control. Products must pass stringent screening at the time of application and will be subject to random field testing directly from the marketplace. To achieve public confidence, the standards must be kept. However, the fact that everyone does not presently meet the standards is exactly why certification will work and participants will prosper.

Tested for toxicity and heavy metals

In addition to the testing standards for mulch set by the council, customers can feel confident that Colorbiotics colorants are made from naturally occurring colors found in the

earth's surface. These colorants, as well as the other ingredients in Colorbiotics, are specially formulated to be nontoxic to plants and animals.

Certified colored mulch also has been tested for toxicity and heavy metals affecting the environment. It does not contain Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) and the toxic heavy metal levels are well below EPA guidelines.

Beyond safety

Consumers will appreciate that while color-enhanced mulch is nontoxic, it is also long lasting. It will typically maintain its color throughout the season, compared to other mulches, which turn gray or white after just a few weeks. Once the colors dry, they are on the mulch permanently. Consumers will not experience color wash-off or leaching.

In addition, mulch will help plants grow better by inhibiting weed growth and preventing weeds from breaking through the soil. Mulch also keeps the soil surface cool and helps it retain moisture.

While mulch will use up some of the nitrogen in the soil as the wood breaks down initially, it will restore the nitrogen back to the soil after the fiber decomposes. Another added bonus is the beauty and variety that mulch brings to your landscape.

For mulch with vibrant color that lasts and is nontoxic, look for certified and tested Colorbiotics colorants.



Mulch producers can help ensure quality of these products by starting with safe colorant.

OPERATIONAL TIPS

The Secret of Efficient System Operation

The most important step in efficiently operating colorant equipment is “knowing what your output is, and keeping it at the same level,” says David Roller, colorant systems manager at Colorbiotics. By effectively tracking output, a producer can make colorant and water adjustments accurately to that output. “When these adjustments aren’t made accurately then not only is efficiency down, but you lower the quality of your final product and increase costs,” Roller says.

Because knowing output makes such a difference to the overall operation, Roller advises completing a simple output calculation daily. “Output won’t necessarily change daily, but the calculation will confirm that everything is running as it should,” he says. To calculate output, let the machine stop on auto-controls. Then start the machine by dumping the first bucket in and when the machine starts, start timing and let the machine run for approximately one hour. After about one hour, let the machine stop by the auto controls. Check to see how many buckets have been processed and

calculate the output by the time. This gives a constant calculation to measure against every day. If there is variation in that output, then a producer can adjust the colorant if needed — or determine if another factor is affecting output.

Output can be affected by:

- **Type of material being colored** — a long, stringy mulch flows differently than a finer ground mulch and causes the blades to work harder to push material through the machine.



- **Wear items** — parts such as mixing blades may need to be replaced.
- **Improper loading of machine** — if the hopper is not at minimum fill point, then it won’t maintain the same output.



Proper loading of the machine is key to maintaining a consistent output.

Limit Downtime with Preventive Maintenance

Performing preventive maintenance can mean the difference between having a machine that operates efficiently and having operators sit idly during busy season while waiting for replacement parts or repairs. Proactive maintenance of components like the compressor, gear box, bearings, or color pump takes a small amount of time, yet dramatically reduces the possibility of them failing when it matters most.

“Our operator’s manual shows when weekly, daily, or hourly maintenance needs to be done on each serviceable component,” said David Roller, colorant systems manager at Colorbiotics. “This includes main components and other wear items like blades. We also perform training at setup and offer refresher training every time we’re on the yard.”

Colorbiotics is also adding a third member to the technical team who will visit every machine on the East Coast at least annually. “We understand new operators know how to operate the machine, but they may not be operating as efficiently as possible.”

Colorbiotics invests heavily in educating operators about preventive maintenance because regular maintenance extends the life of the machine and prevents downtime. “Some operators argue that it’s easier to replace a machine than maintain it, but that’s a difficult position to support,” Roller states. “Once a machine is down, it takes time to replace the part or make repairs, so operators may be idle, and customers may be kept waiting.”

Plus, with Colorbiotics equipment, very little maintenance is required. “We’ve taken painstaking efforts to make equipment that is low maintenance and simple to operate,” Roller says. **“It’s important to stay on top of maintenance for all of your equipment for proper operation and longevity.”**

IMAGINATION, PASSION, COMMITMENT, AND SOLUTIONS



Your Colorbionics Territory Manager
Is Ready To Help.

At Colorbionics, we know that quality service is a key to our success and your continued profitability. That is why as your territory manager, I strive to understand your business and the challenges you face. My goal is to be a valuable business resource. In addition to providing you with quality colorants and equipment, I can assist you in finding solutions that help your operation run more efficiently and effectively.

I am backed by a talented team of technical service professionals who can offer equipment expertise and hands-on training. Our service team is ready at any time to answer questions. I am also ready to help when needed.

We offer our imagination, passion, commitment, and solutions on an on-going basis because we want our relationship to be strong for years to come.

Thank you for your continued business and feel free to contact me.

For additional information on Colorbionics colorants and coloring systems contact your local sales representative.

www.colorbionics.com • Toll-free 888-663-6980



801 Dayton Avenue
Ames, Iowa 50010

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DES MOINES, IA
PERMIT NO. 2995