

New Turfgrass And Landscape Mulch Developed

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Landscapers and turfgrass professionals have a new mulch to use this spring, thanks to research in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Pennmulch (patent pending) was developed by agronomy instructor George Hamilton. The product is made from chopped newsprint, magazines, and other paper, and can be used in place of traditional mulching materials.

In addition to creating a use for large volumes of waste paper, the product addresses a long-standing need in the industry. "Mulching is crucial in turfgrass seedbeds for holding moisture, reducing ero-

sion, and protecting seeds from temperature extremes," says Hamilton.

"But traditional mulches present problems. Many professionals use hydromulch — mixture of wood fiber or ground paper combined with fertilizer and seed, which is sprayed onto seedbeds. Hydromulching requires an expensive machine and a high-volume water source for filling the hydromulcher.

"The alternative is straw, which often contains weed seeds, tends to blow away, and is difficult to store and handle," Hamilton adds. "In addition, soil microorganisms that break down straw also deplete

soil nitrogen." Pennmulch is shaped into small, green pellets that are easy to ship and store. "It looks exactly like rabbit food," Hamilton explains. "The pellets can be spread by hand nor by many types of conventional spreaders owned by turfgrass professionals and landscapers. A starter fertilizer can be combined with the product so that fertilizing and mulching is done in one step."

When the pellets become wet, they expand to several times their original size so that a small amount covers a large area. Also, because the mulch is made entirely paper, there's no danger of

seedbeds being contaminated by weed seeds.

While Pennmulch currently is marketed only to commercial operations, Hamilton hopes to make it available to homeowners soon. "The producer has a large marketing potential," says Hamilton. "A Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture survey shows that in 1989 homeowners spent nearly \$19 million on grass seed.

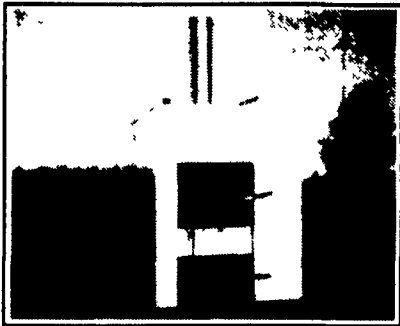
"Pennmulch has great possibilities for retail because it can be sold in any size bag, it is shipped and stored much more easily than traditional mulches and the shelf life is unlimited," he adds. "Although it was designed for use in

grass seedbeds, we're looking into other uses, such as vegetable gardens and ornamental plantings.

Research on the product began three years ago with a Ben Franklin Partnership Environmental Technology Fund, which included in-kind support from Penn State's College of Agricultural Services.

Pennmulch currently is being manufactured by Penn Mulch, Inc., located in Pittsburgh. Last fall 50 tons of the mulch were produced and about 40 tons were sold to turfgrass and landscape companies.

For more information about Pennmulch, contact George Hamilton at (814) 863-3007 or h8x@psuvm.psu.edu.



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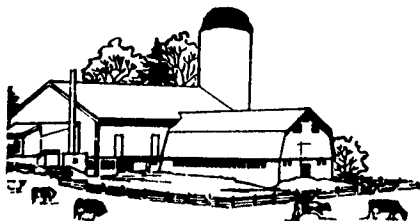
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