We all know that our environment is changing. Other than this last winter, the past few seasons have experienced less snow, spring seems to come earlier and summer seems to be the recipient of more storms that are more violent in nature, greater heat and less moisture. All over the planet, weather patterns are changing. This causes concern for gardeners, horticulturalists and agriculturalists everywhere. But just as nature changes and evolves, so too must we. As gardeners we must be adaptable to these changing conditions in how we tend our gardens.

With hotter, drier summers, we need to ensure that our plants do not dry out, after all we may have nurtured them from seeds to seedlings or else paid good money to purchase plants that were already thriving and we don’t want to lose a single one. So once we have planted them, it’s time to consider their maintenance. That’s where mulch comes in. It’s the last thing you do in the garden and by far, one of the most important, for mulch is a garden’s best friend.

What’s mulch you say? Simply stated, it is a covering for the soil. Several different products can be used as mulch — bark chips, chopped leaves, cocoa bean husks, small pebbles or stones, recycled glass or shredded cedar bark. Each gardener has their own personal favourite. Some like cocoa beans, as it smells nice, others like chopped leaves because it is cheap, simply rake your leaves and mulch them with a lawn mower, then spread them on the garden. The English use a lot of pea gravel. My personal favourite is shredded cedar mulch, as I think it looks the most natural in our Muskoka landscape.

One of the newest mulches on the market is a blend of coconut fibre and coir chunk, a sustainable and renewable product.

Mulch serves several functions.

- It keeps moisture in the soil.
- It keeps the sun out of the soil.
- It keeps birds out of the garden.
- It keeps weeds out of the garden.
- It helps retain soil temperature.
- It provides a base for new plants.
- It improves the soil structure.
- It improves the air in the soil.

The Muskoka Gardener

Kathy Wood

Garden quote

I love my garden, and I love working in it. To part with green, growing things, watching each day to see the dear, new sprouts come up, is like taking a hand in creation, I think. Just now my garden is like faith — the substance of things hoped for.

Lucy Maud Montgomery, Anne’s House of Dreams, XVIII

Muskoka plant of the week

Quaking aspen (Populus tremuloides) — Known by its distinctively white bark and its leaves that flutter in the breeze. Aspen adapt to a range of soils and their leaves turn golden in the fall. Birds feed on the buds, catkins and seeds.

You can find a variety of mulch choices at your local garden centre.