



# TOT TALK

Most of you New Bern parents will agree with the cynic, making a play on words, who says a baby that's a healthy pink may also be a loud yell. And, remembering delivery costs, could there be a better way to describe the stork than to say it is the bird with the big bill?

Incidentally, there's a great

deal of truth in the observation that children are often spoiled because you can't spank their grandmothers. It should be added, of course, that a lot of grandfathers need spanking even worse for the selfsame reason.

We're not saying this to be critical of you oldsters who insist on making a fool of yourself. Rest assured that if we have the good fortune to become a grandparent, we'll give proud Gramps like Ronald Ippock and Shorty Kafer a run for their money.

Unless we're badly mistaken, this editor has the dubious distinction of being the only father since the turn of the century who used to roll his firstborn along Middle Street in a baby carriage, and later a stroller, without the infant's mother on hand to take care of unforeseen emergencies.

Seeing a man pushing a baby carriage all by himself, on a

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## Advantages and Disadvantages of Mulches Discussed by State Writer

BY M. E. GARDNER

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What about mulches? What are some of the advantages? Disadvantages? Let's see what we can learn about mulches.

Nature mulches the roots of plants with fallen leaves. This means that no cultivation is practiced where plants grow naturally. The forest floor is a good example. Moisture is conserved and plant foods are manufactured due to the decomposition of organic matter. Soil is conserved by the prevention of erosion.

Under these mulches, whether natural or man-made, many things happen. Chemical change is taking place. Bacteria by the billions play a part, as do the fungi. Moisture is necessary for all life processes. Good soil is teeming with living things and we who live on the soil are dependent upon its good performance.

I guess that we could agree, then, that the use of mulches is one method of duplicating natural processes by providing a happy soil environment in the flower, vegetable and fruit gardens. Now let's see why this is true by reviewing some of the advantages of mulching.

Probably the greatest advantage of a mulch is the conservation of moisture. Evaporation is greatly reduced by protecting the soil from the direct rays of the sun; and from air movement. Raindrops are gently and quickly absorbed and the soil is protected from compaction. Erosion, the greatest enemy of our soils, is prevented. Mulches are especially helpful during prolonged periods of hot dry weather.

Don't expect a mulch to control all weeds completely. It will help, especially with the annuals. Where pre-emergence treatments are used to control weeds, the mulch is more effective.

The soil temperature is reduced under a good mulch. This is of material help because some beneficial soil microorganisms are not happy under high soil temperature condi-

busy downtown thoroughfare, would look somewhat ridiculous to us now, and probably looked just as ridiculous then to a lot of New Bernians.

It was worth the smirks, however, to have fellow pedestrians halt us and rave about a young daughter who was as bald as a peeled egg. With or without hair, she was beautiful to us, so naturally we assumed the compliments showered were simply her just due.

If by chance you have a girl baby at your house who is likewise devoid of foliage on her cranium, don't panic. Just be patient, and eventually she'll probably have the best head of hair in the entire neighborhood.

tions. Neither are tender roots near the surface. The decomposition of most mulches improves soil structure and aeration of the root zone.

Mulches in the apple orchard prevent bruising of dropped fruit and keep ripening strawberries clean by preventing the splashing of soil and sand by the raindrops. Mulches also prevent heaving of the soil during winter freezes.

While the advantages of mulches far outweigh the disadvantages, a few of the latter might be mentioned. A match or cigarette carelessly dropped in pine needles, grain straw or leaves may destroy all you have

tried to accomplish. Mice and moles may be more troublesome under mulches but can be controlled by ground sprays, traps or baits. This is the one you want to watch for--nitrogen starvation.

The more woody or fibrous the mulch the greater the need for nitrogen to decompose it by favorable bacterial action. The bacteria are going to get their share of the nitrogen supply first and the leaves may turn yellow on the plants unless the supply is adequate for both the nitrifying bacteria and the plants. This is not difficult to adjust if you use good judgment.

There are many mulching materials available: peat moss, old sawdust, pine straw, grain straws, ground corncobs, peanut hulls, milled bark and compost. Choose the one that has given you best results.



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