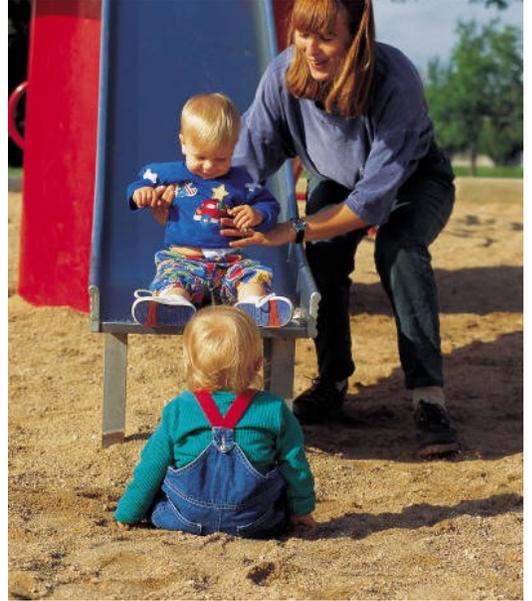


# Playground Surfaces

Written by Mark Jones



**Engineered Wood Fiber-** This product looks like wood (color and texture) but is actually tire reclaim. It is very attractive and provides a great soft fill and feel. It comes in bags, the church could probably install themselves. There is always a trade off--either higher maintenance or higher initial cost. IF the engineered wood fiber (not wood mulch) is bought from a reputable source, it can be a very good alternative. It still has its negatives in that it needs replenishing yearly. It is a proven product in terms of safety. It has to be contained well and works best in a compacted depth of at least 8". It will tend to 'rut' out under swings or at the bottom of slides and thus requires some occasional raking. Call Grounds For Play (in Mansfield, TX) and ask for Shane Jefferys (800-552-7529).

**Man-Made Surfacing** (artificial turf became the best top-of-the-line product) but the cost is significantly higher on the front end. However, it has almost zero maintenance over 10-15 years and is usable immediately after a rain. Call Grounds For Play (in Mansfield, TX) and ask for Shane Jefferys (800-552-7529). What's best for one client may not be best for another due to climate, budget, etc.

**Rubber Mulch-** It doesn't attract cats like sand does---doesn't track into the building or fill up little shoes!! Only drawback, is that when it REALLY rains ---- the heavy torrential kind----it does float out some. Not all of it----but some-----and so over time it has to be swept up and put back into the playground or you have to buy more. It's been down about 5 years and are just now to the point we need to buy more----so that gives you an idea of how much "floats" out!!! You can purchase rubber mulch at Sam's Club \$9.99 a bag there, or was last summer. It's not rough on the kids feet, and it doesn't get hot. Several churches use rubber mulch on their preschool playground and really like it. It doesn't track in too badly and it drains well after a rain. Easy to buy bags at Sam's Club when needed to replenish some bare spots. Some are concerned it would leave black all over the kids or get hot. No one expressed that actually happened. Most were happy with the rubber mulch option.

**Rubber Chips** It is some kind of blue hard rubber. It is not only ugly, but impossible to clean up when it spills out into the grass, and somehow gets tracked into the building. Much more expensive, and heard that there are concerns about toxic chemicals leaching from rubber playground surfaces. Should be investigated before purchasing.

**Wood Chips,** Playground companies are encouraging the wood chips. There are problems with wood chips floating away when hard wood mulch locks together and resists floating. Compacting is an issue so raking and fluffing are required. Drainage and depth of chips are important when planning.

**Wood Mulch-** Provides little maintenance or problems. It does have to be fluffed between additions of new mulch...used a rot-o-tiller. Lack of drainage can be a nightmare ( One minister reported- big clumps of nasty mold ("dog vomit mold"—real name, no joke—because that's what it looked like). Most were happy with wood mulch. Drainage and depth of mulch are important when planning.

**Pea Gravel & Sand** are common surfaces but problems come with gravel in noses and ears and sand blowing or cat issues.

**Rubber Bonded Surface** One minister commented they have had this surface in their playground for nine years. "At that time, to save us money, they allowed us to install it without the concrete slab under it. This didn't work as some of the sand/dirt washed out from under it and has made it an unstable surface that has cracked and torn in places. I would advise making sure it's installed on a concrete slab (and they might require it now). But, it solved our problem of needing something handi-cap accessible for safe play. <http://www.exerplay.com/products/surfacing.php> (products that are something like the vitriturf and the playturf on this website)

*\* Budgets dictate what can be purchased. Maybe this will give you a better idea while shopping for the best you can provide at this time.*

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