

# Soft - fall surfacing

## Soft-fall surfaces for play equipment... ...which one is right for your playground?

The definition of an effective soft-fall surface is **“an impact absorbing medium that slows the falling child down over the greatest possible distance”**

That means the child is decelerating as slowly as possible which reduces the shock of the fall.

However, there is no such thing as the perfect soft-fall material for every situation.

Whilst mulch materials (such as pine bark chips) are generally the softest, they need maintenance to retain that softness.

Synthetic materials such as Rubber Surfacing are great for areas that would otherwise require high maintenance but the static nature of Rubber Surfacing does not have the “give” of a loose fill product.

So when you are considering which soft-fall is best for your playground, you need to think about:

1. **Softness** – *what is the softest option you can use given the location?*
2. **The environmental impact** – *is the product an environmentally responsible choice?*
3. **Cost** – *does your budget fit the product and the maintenance?*
4. **Design Opportunities** – *do you need to include shapes/colours & designs in the surface to enhance the play area?*
5. **Ease of Maintenance** – *do you have a maintenance plan?*

On the following page you will be able to compare all of the common types of soft-fall surfacing that are available.

**Important:**

*You must request certification from your supplier that any soft-fall product meets or exceeds the relevant Australian Standard AS:4422-1996*



Sand



Mulch



Synthetic Turf



Rubber Surfacing

# Organic

## Soft-fall characteristics

### Playground Sand

**Made from:** Washed, filtered beach sand  
**Softness:** Good if maintained correctly  
**Maintenance required:** Medium  
**Environmental impact:** Low  
**Availability:** Fair  
**Initial cost:** Low/medium  
**Notes:** Only available from specialist suppliers



Playground Sand

### Radiata Pine Bark Chips

**Made from:** Waste material from plantation radiata pine industry  
**Softness:** Excellent if maintained correctly  
**Maintenance required:** Medium  
**Environmental impact:** Low  
**Availability:** Good  
**Initial cost:** Low  
**Notes:** Available from most landscape outlets



Radiata Pine  
Bark Chips

### Cypress Pine Mulch

**Made from:** Waste material from plantation cypress pine industry  
**Softness:** Excellent if maintained correctly  
**Maintenance required:** Medium  
**Environmental impact:** Low  
**Availability:** Fair  
**Initial cost:** Low/medium  
**Notes:** Only available from specialist manufacturers



Cypress Pine Mulch

### Cypress Pine Fines

**Made from:** Waste material from plantation cypress pine industry  
**Softness:** Excellent if maintained correctly  
**Maintenance required:** Medium  
**Environmental impact:** Low  
**Availability:** Fair  
**Initial cost:** Low/medium  
**Notes:** Only available from specialist manufacturers



Cypress Pine Fines

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# Synthetic

## Soft-fall characteristics

### Synthetic Turf

**Made from:** Polyethylene fibres

**Softness:** Good

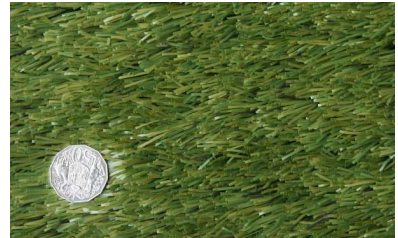
**Maintenance required:** Medium

**Environmental impact:** Medium

**Availability:** Good

**Initial cost:** Medium/high

**Notes:** A softer "leaf" than Tufted Synthetic Turf



Synthetic Turf

### Oxide Colour Recycled Rubber Surfacing

**Made from:** Recycled tyres coloured on-site using concrete colouring oxides

**Softness:** Good

**Maintenance required:** Medium

**Environmental impact:** Positive recycled product

**Availability:** Good

**Initial cost:** Medium

**Notes:** Lowest cost rubber but colours can "patch"



Oxide Colour  
Recycled Rubber Surfacing

### UV Painted Recycled Rubber Surfacing

**Made from:** Recycled tyres painted with UV stable paint in controlled colour batches

**Softness:** Good

**Maintenance required:** Low

**Environmental impact:** Positive recycled product

**Availability:** Good

**Initial cost:** High

**Notes:** The best features vs. cost solution in rubber



UV Painted  
Recycled Rubber Surfacing

### EPDM Rubber Surfacing

**Made from:** Ethylene Propylene diene Monomer which is a man made rubberised plastic

**Softness:** Good

**Maintenance required:** Low

**Environmental impact:** Higher

**Availability:** Good

**Initial cost:** Extra high

**Notes:** More vibrancy of colour than recycled products



EPDM Rubber Surfacing

**Important:**

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