Which is most economical?

In the following example a 300 sq' planting bed is used. Costs are based on work completed by Desertscape Landscaping for the year 2006 season.

BARK		VS	STONE	
Year 1 - 2 yards of bark	$ 60.00		**Year 1** - 2 ton of decorative stone	$ 120.00
- Delivery	35.00		- Delivery	35.00
- Labor	92.00		- Labor	184.00
Total cost for 1st yr.	$ 187.00		- Typar weed barrier fabric	50.00
			Total cost for 1st yr.	$ 389.00
$202.00 savings by using bark instead of stone.				
Year 2 - 1 yard of bark	$ 30.00		**Year 2** - Total cost for 2nd yr.	$ 0.00
- Delivery	35.00			
- Labor	46.00			
- Total cost for 2nd yr.	$ 111.00			
- Total cost for 1st yr.	187.00			
Total cost for 1st & 2nd yr.	$ 298.00			
$91.00 savings by using bark instead of stone.				
Year 3 - Remove existing bark	$ 92.00		**Year 3** - Total cost for 3rd yr.	$ 0.00
- Disposal charge	35.00			
- 2 yards of new bark	60.00			
- Delivery	35.00			
- Labor	92.00			
- Total cost for 3rd yr.	$ 314.00			
- Total cost for 1st & 2nd yr.	298.00			
Total cost for 1 thru 3rd yr.	$ 612.00			
$223.00 additional cost. (Stone a better savings)				

After the second year from the time of the initial installation you are still saving some money if you use bark instead of stone. Keep in mind bark is an organic material and will decompose, so it must be applied to the planting areas every year in order that you have bark and for aesthetic purposes. After a couple years It is best to completely remove the existing bark/soil buildup otherwise an over abundance of weeds will develop because of the soil mix the bark has created due to decomposition. When your neighbor who has stone planting beds is sitting on his porch sipping a cool lemonade while he watches you pull weeds from your planting beds it's time to give stone a second thought.

How the contenders match up. Advantages and disadvantages of each.

BARK

Advantages

- Breaks down and provides essential nutrients to the plant.
- Retains moisture and provides plants a cool, moist media to grow in.
- Initial placement looks good.
- Temporarily cuts down on the cost of weeding.
- Short term cost savings.
- In proper setting bark looks nice.

Disadvantages

- Due to decomposition, bark must be added every year to deter weed growth and maintain aesthetic appearance.
- Harbors insects and pests that can harm plant appearance and growth.
- Wind & rain moves bark onto lawns, sidewalks and drives
- Squirrels, birds and other animals will dig around in the bark looking for food.
- Spring/fall cleanups in planting beds are difficult because bark is so light and is easily raked up with the leaves.
- Requires a lot of maintenance, and high cost upkeep.
- Susceptible to Slime molds, Bird's nest fungi, Mushrooms and Artillery fungus.

STONE

Advantages

- Stone is heavier than bark and makes spring /fall cleanups much quicker and easier. Leaves and other debris can be raked out, blown away or vacuumed up.
- Lasts indefinitely (will not decompose like bark).
- Major cost savings after the third year from the time of installation.
- Very little maintenance.
- Weed growth is virtually eliminated when weed barrier fabric is used.
- Compliments the house and plants.
- Animals will not move stone around.

Disadvantages

- Initial cost is greater and more labor intensive.
- Plants may need to be fertilized each year to provide essential nutrients if soil nutrients are depleted.