

# CARING FOR NEW TREES

Newly planted trees need care, especially in the first two to three years after planting

## Watering

New trees need lots of water. Watering with a garden hose at low volume or utilizing a soaker hose is ideal since it allows water to slowly infiltrate the soil. Less frequent, but thorough watering is more beneficial to root development than frequent shallow watering. Tree roots need oxygen. Over-watering is just as problematic as under-watering. Test the soil moisture by using a trowel to dig two inches into the soil. Use your fingers to feel the soil in the small trench you created. If it is dry, it is time to water. You can use a hose at the base of the tree, with water on low or purchase watering bags that you fill for a slow soaking.

It is hard to say exactly how much to water your tree, but 15 gallons once per week is a good starting place for trees that are approximately 1.5 inches in caliper. If your tree is larger than that, or if the weather is hot and dry, increase the amount of water or water twice a week. Water your tree for the first two years after planting. Begin watering when the ground thaws and until the ground freezes.

### What about lawn sprinklers and rainfall?

Lawn sprinklers do not provide the deep watering that trees need. Natural rainfall often isn't enough.

## Tree Stabilization

Tree stabilization may be necessary in windy areas or for trees without an adequate root system. Tree stabilization may consist of stakes, guys, and other materials. Here we describe a method using stakes, but there are a variety of systems out there, with varying costs and amounts of labor required. If you are using stakes, use 2 to 3 stakes, placed just inside the edge of the mulch ring and wide nylon or canvas straps, tied loosely around the trunk. For an unstable root ball, use 1-3 stakes attached low on the trunk. Remove all stakes after 1 year.

## Trunk Guards

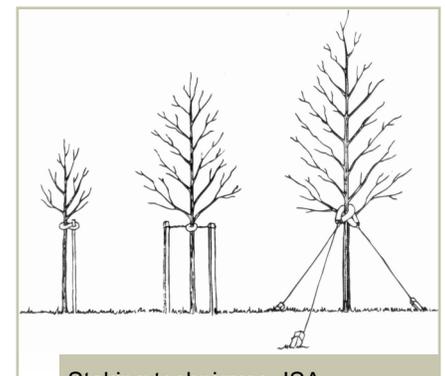
If winter damage to the trunk by rodents or rabbits is a concern, install a trunk guard made of plastic tubing, hardware cloth, or wire fencing. Allow 1-4 inches of space around the trunk and ensure it is tall enough to protect in snow. Remove in spring.



Slow watering with a hose



A watering bag placed around its own stake. Bags can also be placed around the trunk, but be sure to monitor the trunk for moisture and insect problems.



Staking techniques, ISA, bugwood.org #5377056



## Mulching

Mulch is any woody or herbaceous material spread over the root zone of a plant. Mulch can be aged wood chips, shredded bark, pine needles, composted leaves, composted grass clippings, and other organic material.

### Why mulch?

Mulch reduces the shortcomings of urban sites by replicating natural processes of the forest. Mulch increases available nutrients and water retention, buffers soil temperatures, and provides root protection. Mulch also reduces root-zone erosion potential, soil compaction, weed growth, and prevents lawnmower, string trimmer, and other machinery damage.

### How to use mulch.

Place mulch in a ring at least 3 inches away from the tree trunk, at a depth of 2-4 inches, and ideally out to the tree crown. When in doubt use the 3-3-3 method, mulching 3 inches high, 3 inches away from the trunk, in a 3-foot ring. Occasionally, you may need to pull mulch away from the trunk of the tree as the mulch settles around the trunk. Raking away old mulch before applying new mulch helps maintain correct mulch depth.

## Fertilizing

New trees typically do not require fertilization. Only use fertilizer if a soil test indicates a deficiency. For information on testing your soil, contact the UMass Soil and Plant Nutrient Testing Lab, 413-545-2311 or <https://soiltest.umass.edu/>. Improper use of fertilizer can damage your tree and the environment.

## Pruning and Periodic Inspection

Prune only dead and broken branches at planting. After 2 years, you may begin structural pruning. Your tree will likely require pruning every 1-2 years to establish and maintain proper structure. If your tree is within 10 feet of utility lines, or you need to use a ladder or chainsaw, contact an arborist. For guidance on tools, techniques, and safety, see *The Tree Owner's Manual*, pages 18-23. Periodically, inspect the tree for insect and disease problems. Protect the tree from lawn mowers and string trimmers, construction, soil compaction, and road salt.

### REFERENCES:

Tree Owner's Manual,  
[www.treeownersmanual.info](http://www.treeownersmanual.info)

Tree Planting Best Management Practices. 2014. 2nd ed. Champaign, IL: International Society of Arboriculture

Arbor Day Foundation Videos  
[www.arborday.org/trees/video-library.cfm](http://www.arborday.org/trees/video-library.cfm)

New Tree Planting. 2011. International Society of Arboriculture,  
[www.treesaregood.com/treecare/resources/new\\_treeplanting.pdf](http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/resources/new_treeplanting.pdf)



Correct mulch technique



This poor practice is commonly seen in the landscape and is harmful to trees.

### Bureau of Forestry

Urban & Community Forestry Program

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation  
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600  
Boston, MA 02114

[www.mass.gov/dcr/ucf](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/ucf)



In Partnership with the Massachusetts Tree Wardens' & Foresters' Association, this factsheet series is funded in part by a grant from the USDA Forest Service.

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