

Caring for Newly Planted Trees

Water

Newly planted trees, while they still have their leaves, need to be watered once a week during the first two years after planting if there has not been at least an inch of rain in the prior week.

- If you have a watering bag around your tree, once a week insert a garden hose in the slit near the top of the bag to fill the bag. The water will drip slowly into the area of the tree roots.
- If there is no tree watering bag around the trunk of the tree or a hose is not available, then each young tree should get 2 to 3 gallons of water applied directly to the surrounding ground weekly. Apply water directly over the root ball. Also be sure to keep the backfill soil in the planting hole moist. This encourages the roots to expand beyond the root ball into the backfill soil. Tree roots grow so remember to expand the area being watered over time. To pinpoint exactly how long you should leave a sprinkler on, place an empty soup can under the tree. Time how long it takes to fill the can with two inches of water, then water for that length of time in the future.



Mulch

To optimize root production, water uptake, and establishment of newly planted trees apply a three inch layer of organic mulch around newly planted trees in a circle that extends several feet beyond the tree canopy. Leave 3 inches around the trunk free of mulch. **Mulch should not touch the trunk of the tree.** The mulch should be placed like a donut with the tree in the hole of the donut.

Mulching around newly planted trees with 3 inches of organic materials (wood chips, pine needles, etc.) has several advantages over bare soil cultivation.

Mulch:

- decreases water evaporation from soil.
- serves as a sponge that prevents runoff around plants growing in heavy clay soils or on sloped sites.
- helps to control growth of weeds.
- insulates soil and buffers extreme summer and winter soil temperatures.
- reduces soil compaction from mowing equipment.
- prevents damage to stems and trunks by lawn mowers and weed cutters.
- improves soil health as it decomposes.



Applying more than 3 inches of mulch over the root area or building a mountain of mulch at the base of the tree trunk is **NOT GOOD** for the tree. It may:

- prevent movement of rain or irrigation water into the root ball of newly planted trees. This may prevent water from reaching the tree roots.
- lead to root production and growth in the mulch. This often results in circling and girdling roots.
- reduce oxygen levels around roots and cause root suffocation.
- keep poorly drained soils too wet, which favors root rot development.
- keep bark excessively wet when piled around trunks and stems. This may lead to bark decay.
- create habitat for rodents that chew bark.

At the end of April, during the Annual Arbor Day celebration, Shade Tree Commissioners demonstrate the proper way to plant, mulch and water a tree.