

## CARING FOR NEW TREES

Congratulations! If you are reading this, it means you are caring for a newly-planted tree. Your actions over the next two to three years will help your tree establish in the landscape and survive for years to come. What should you be doing?

### WATERING

New trees need water, and lots of it. Watering with a garden hose at low volume or utilizing a soaker hose is ideal since it allows water to slowly infiltrate the soil while minimizing the potential for root ball erosion. Less frequent, but thorough, watering is more beneficial to root development than more frequent, but shallow, watering. Tree roots need oxygen and over-watering is just as problematic as under-watering. You can test the soil moisture by sticking your finger about an inch into the soil. If it is dry, it is time to water.

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 it is very hot and dry, increase the amount of water or water twice a week.

### What about lawn sprinklers and rainfall?

Lawn sprinklers do not provide the deep watering that trees need. Natural rainfall often isn't enough. Water your tree for the first two years after planting. Begin watering when the ground thaws in April and continue through November when the ground freezes.

You can also purchase watering bags that you fill with a hose for a slow soaking or you can simply leave a hose at the base of the tree, with water on low.

### TREE STABILIZATION

Tree stabilization may be necessary in areas with high winds, where mower or string trimmer damage is likely, for high-traffic areas, or for trees that do not have 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

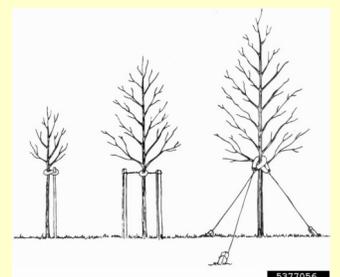
If winter damage to the trunk by rodents is a concern, install a trunk guard made of plastic tubing, hardware cloth, or wire fencing. Allow 1-4 inches of space around the trunk and ensure it is tall enough to protect in snow. Remove in the spring.



Slow watering with a hose



A watering bag



Staking techniques, ISA, bugwood.org



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### MULCHING

Mulch is any woody or herbaceous material. Mulch can be aged wood chips, shredded bark, pine needles, composted leaves, composted grass clippings, and other organic material.

**Why mulch?** Mulching your new tree is important. Mulch reduces the shortcomings of urban sites by replicating natural processes occurring in 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 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

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



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

### 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 weed whackers, 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 ♦ *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) ♦ Arbor Day Foundation Videos <https://www.arborday.org/trees/video-library.cfm>

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In Partnership with:  
USDA Forest Service and  
the Massachusetts Tree Wardens' &  
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