

## 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 become established in the landscape and survive for years to come. What should you be doing?

### WATERING

New trees need water, especially during hot summer weather! 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. Remember that tree roots need oxygen and over-watering is just as problematic as under-watering.

It is hard to say exactly how much to water your tree. Natural rainfall and specific soil conditions can vary, but newly-planted trees need approximately 1.5 inches of rain per week. This translates to about 10 gallons per caliper inch, per week, from spring through autumn.

### An Easy Watering Technique

Using 10 one-gallon plastic jugs, carefully perforate the bottom of the jugs and place them around the base of the tree tied together and then fill them with water. This will allow the water to slowly seep out and water the tree.

You can also purchase watering bags that you fill, using a hose to allow for a slow soaking.

### 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 after 1 year.

### TRUNK GUARDS

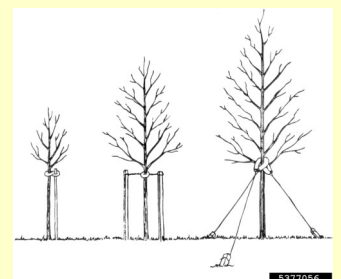
If winter damage to the trunk by rodents is a concern, install a trunk guard made of plastic tubing, hardware cloth, or wire fencing. Allow 1-4 inches of space around the trunk and ensure it is tall enough to protect in snow. Remove in the spring.



Watering technique using one-gallon jugs



Watering bag



Staking techniques, ISA, [bugwood.org](http://bugwood.org)



## CARING FOR NEW TREES

### MULCHING

Mulch is any woody or herbaceous material applied over the root zone that improves tree health by replicating the forest floor. 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 and serves more than just an aesthetic function. 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, and 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. Raking away old mulch before applying new mulch helps maintain correct mulch depth. Occasionally, you may need to pull mulch away from the trunk of the tree as the mulch settles around.

### 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.

### PRUNING AND PERIODIC INSPECTION

Prune 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 human activities such as 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)



Root Zone  
Correct mulch technique



Improper mulch technique—piled on trunk and does not cover whole root zone

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/urban-and-community-forestry](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/urban-and-community-forestry)

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

