

CanopyBloomington's Young Tree Care Cheat Sheet

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Use this guide to help get your new tree off to a great start!

Watering

Consistently watering your new tree will help its roots get established in the soil and will alleviate heat and drought stress, and is the #1 most important maintenance need. Sprinklers aren't enough to thoroughly water your tree to the full depth of its roots, so **water your tree with 15-20 gallons of water per week** (10 gallons per inch of tree trunk diameter at your chest height), especially during weeks it doesn't rain. Spread the water in a 2-3 ft diameter area around the trunk. Begin watering your tree when the ground thaws in the spring until the ground freezes for at least the first 2-3 years the tree is in the ground. Be careful not to overwater – check the top 2 inches of soil for moisture level, first, and if it's moist to the touch, skip watering until it's dry!



Mulching

Mulching is one of the best things you can do for your new tree! Mulch insulates and regulates temperature for the soil containing the roots, helps retain water and provide nutrients, reduces weed growth, and prevents soil compaction and damage from mowers and foot traffic. A guidance tip for mulching is the **3-3-3 rule: 3 inches deep, 3 inches away from the base of the tree, and in a 2-3 foot wide ring**. NEVER pile mulch against the base of a tree, which will cause rot and undesirable root growth. Instead, mulch in a donut shape with a berm that directs water towards the tree base.

Trunk Guards & Tree Stabilization

Tree stabilization is not always necessary for newly planted trees, but can be for trees that are in windy sites or have inadequate root systems comparative to the tree's canopy. **If a tree is leaning or is unstable**, stakes can be installed and attached to it using a flat, soft, flexible material (no rope or cording!). There are varying methods of staking based on tree size and needs. **Remove stakes after a year** and frequently check that the tree isn't being girdled by the staking material. **Rigid mesh tree guards should be installed on young trees to protect from deer and mower damage**, and should be removed when the tree outgrows it.



Formative Pruning

Pruning young trees is crucial for their long-term survival. Prioritize removing **dead, damaged, and diseased (DDD)** branches on young trees, especially in the first 2-3 years. In addition, always remove sucker sprouts as they appear near the base of the trunk (left photo). Your tree should be pruned every 1-2 years in order to develop proper structure and form! NEVER engage in the harmful pruning practice calling topping. Structural pruning should be considered within the first 5 years – for more information about proper pruning cuts, when to prune, and types of pruning methods, visit our pruning guide at <https://www.canopybloomington.org/tree-pruning-guide>.

Additional Considerations

Improper fertilization can damage your tree, so only fertilize your tree if a soil test indicates a deficiency. **New trees do not typically need to be fertilized**, so err on the side of caution! What new trees DO need is **periodic inspections for pests, diseases, and DDD branches** (see above). Look for these indicators in the spring and early summer, especially. If a tree has an injury such as mechanical or deer damage, be sure to monitor the injury for fungal growth or pests. If you need help identifying a pest or disease or need advice on how to treat a tree with a secondary stressor, please reach out to us!



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