

Tree Care for the Fall

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Fall is here, and for some of our areas, there was little water as well as wind during the summer months. Hopefully, your landscape trees were deep watered during the summer months. Water that is shared by lawns and shrubs is rarely adequate for large landscape trees or those actively growing.

Stop watering trees, both evergreen and deciduous, throughout early autumn, until the time when the leaves of the deciduous trees fall. This will allow both evergreen and deciduous trees to enter a transitional phase. What you are trying to avoid is causing spurts of new growth that will not be winter-hardy. Such non-hardy growth is more likely to be damaged if you have cold weather suddenly sweep into your area.

Late autumn, after the deciduous trees have dropped their leaves, give both evergreen and deciduous trees a deep watering. This should be done before the ground freezes. If you were to wait until after the ground freezes, the frozen-solid soil would act as a barrier. This barrier would prevent water from seeping down properly to the root zones of the trees in a timely manner.

Roots may extend 2 to 3 times beyond the reach of the tree's branches, and may not be deeper than 3-4 feet in depth. Deep watering should penetrate to at least 3 feet. Use the branch 'drip line' to determine the area outside of which your watering efforts should be concentrated. This is where the finer roots that absorb the most water are located.

Sprinklers and soaker hoses are not advised for deep irrigation. Shallow flooding may impede oxygen and carbon dioxide movement through the soil. The best deep-water application device is the bare end of a garden hose (Tree Deep Watering; Washington State University).

After setting the hose down at the drip line, set the flow to match the absorption rate of the soil. Avoid runoff and puddling. The type of soil will dictate the time it will take. A probe or shovel will help you determine the rate and depth of the water absorption.

Insufficient water over the course of several years is the most common cause of tree decline. (Tree Decline; Washington State University) Deep, infrequent watering trees instead of relying on the water they can obtain from watering surrounding lawns will provide adequate water in times of heat and wind stress to promote healthy trees.

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