



## TREE CARE

An effective tree maintenance program should include watering, mulching, tree inspection and pruning. Supplemental irrigation of trees can be necessary when soil conditions are dry. The practice of deep and infrequent watering can improve tree health and help prevent insect or disease infestations.

### TREE INSPECTION

By regularly inspecting trees at least once a year, you can prevent or reduce the severity of potential disease, insect and environmental problems. Environmental stress weakens plants, causing [Tree Decline](#) which makes them more susceptible to insect and disease attack. During inspection, check the tree's new leaves or buds, leaf size, and twig growth. Watch for crown dieback and any abnormalities. A decline in normal growth habits can signal changes in tree health. To evaluate a mature tree, compare the growth of shoots over the past three years. Loose bark or deformed growths are often common signs of stem decay. Plastic tree guards can be used in areas where rutting from deer or animal damage is a problem. This is a rigid material that fits loosely over the bark of the tree.

### WATERING

There is not adequate rainfall in the Inland Northwest to support healthy growth on newly planted trees. **Trees must be watered regularly for two to three years after transplanting to provide adequate soil moisture.** Slowly water the entire root zone six inches from the trunk, allowing for soil absorption.

Soil type is a major factor in determining how much water the soil will absorb and how often water is needed. A good guideline is to provide 10 to 20 gallons of water per inch of trunk caliper (diameter) twice a week. Large trees can be allowed to dry several inches down in the soil before watering. **A small or newer established tree should never be allowed to completely dry out.**

Supplemental irrigation of established landscape deciduous trees, conifers and broadleaf evergreens such as Rhododendrons and Oregon grape can be helpful - even necessary - when soil conditions are dry. The practice of [Deep Watering of Trees](#) can improve tree health and help prevent insect or disease infestation.

### MULCHING

Mulch used to cover the soil surface around a tree provides many benefits. Our [Guide to Mulches](#) fact sheet gives information on mulch types and uses.

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e-mail your garden questions to: [mastergardener@spokanecounty.org](mailto:mastergardener@spokanecounty.org)

A properly applied mulch layer conserves moisture, protects roots from temperature extremes, reduces weed and turf competition, and simplifies maintenance by protecting the tree trunk from damage by lawnmowers and line trimmers. The mulched area should be 2 feet in diameter for every inch of trunk caliper (diameter) at a minimum of 6 feet total. The mulch should be two to four inches deep, starting four to six inches away from the tree trunk to prevent crown rot, insect or rodent damage. An adequate organic mulch layer can consist of pine straw, compost, or wood chips.

### **STAKING**

There are many [Myths of Staking](#) trees. Most trees do not need support after planting. Staking can have detrimental effects on the development of trunk caliper and root growth.

There are two situations that may call for staking a tree: a very windy site and an unstable root ball. If staking is necessary, the tree should still be able to move freely. Support stakes generally should be removed after one growing season. Many trees can develop problems when staking wires are left in place and branches become girdled.

### **PRUNING**

Pruning should always be performed sparingly for health, appearance and strength. Never remove more than 30% of the tree canopy at any one time. Refer to our fact sheets, [Keys to Good Pruning](#) and [Pruning Tips and Timing](#) for additional information.

Before pruning, identify what type of tree you have and research its normal growth habit and growth rate. Always consider the natural shape of the tree before pruning, this will help keep you from trying to make a columnar tree into a bush.

- Pruning of young trees and newly planted trees should be extremely limited for the first two to three years.
- For most mature trees, prune during the dormant season before bud break.
- Light pruning and the removal of dead wood can be done anytime.
- When transplanting trees, do not prune the top to compensate for root loss. Remove only dead, broken, diseased or damaged wood.
- Always use clean, sharp pruning tools.
- When pruning is necessary, cut a branch back to the point of origin.
- Pruning cuts should be made just outside the branch collar. Do not leave stubs.

**NEVER, EVER, TOP A TREE!**

### **FERTILIZING**

Use of high-nitrogen fertilizer can cause excessive top growth that is out of balance with a smaller root system. Nutrient deficiencies will show up as leaf abnormalities and can be corrected at that time. If a tree does not grow well, it might be for reasons other than lack of nutrients.

- Do not fertilize young, newly planted trees.
- Mature trees may never require fertilization.