



Taking Care of Your Young Tree

Trees, like people, cannot survive very long without water. Water keeps trees green and cool and dissolves minerals in the soil so the tree roots can drink them up. As your tree grows up, the roots will grow deeply and securely if adequately watered. This takes a while, so for the next three (3) years or so the new tree will depend on you for water.

While it is important to conserve water during a drought, a tree is a long-term investment that will provide many benefits for a significant amount of time if properly watered and maintained. The amount of water a young tree needs per week is equivalent to taking a 5-minute shower in the morning.

Selecting an Appropriate Tree

Many people think that any tree near a sidewalk will break up the concrete and become a nuisance, but damage is preventable. Most trees damage the sidewalk because they were watered incorrectly or insufficiently, or because the wrong species was chosen for the location. It is important to understand a tree's potential size at maturity when choosing what species to plant in a specific location. The size of the tree well, location of overhead power lines, driveways, and structures should be considered when choosing a species. The City of Oakland's approved tree list provides general size information, but further research will help in better understanding a tree's growth rate and potential size at maturity.

Water Your Tree Regularly and Deeply

This is better than many small sprinklings. If you water only a little at a time, only the top layer of soil will get wet and the tree roots will either grow up towards the surface (which can eventually cause damage to concrete) or die from lack of water. If you water deeply, plenty of water will soak downwards, and the roots will grow down to find the lower water level. 15 to 20 gallons of water per week is the general recommendation for newly planted trees for the first 2 years after planting. Provide the same amount of water every other week during the third year. In the fourth year or later, only provide occasional deep watering during times of excessive lack of rain or drought.

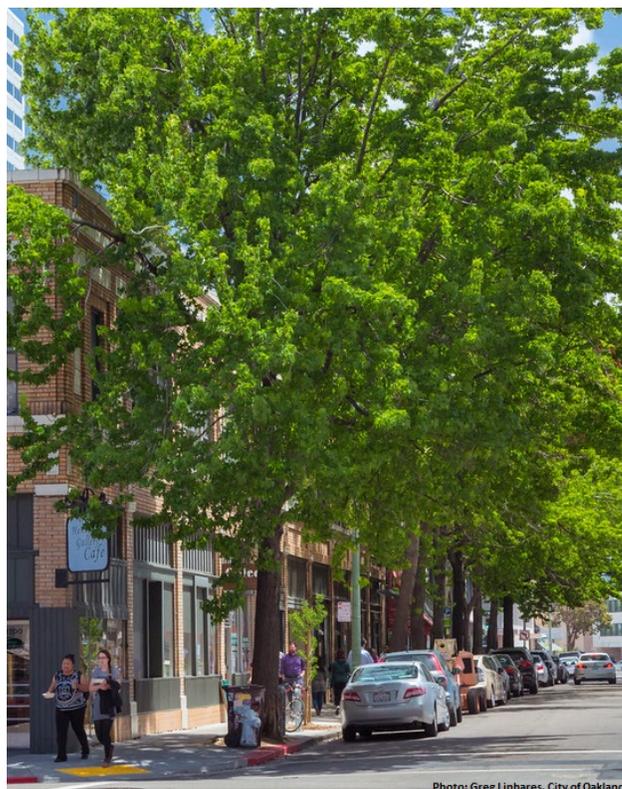


Photo: Greg Linhares, City of Oakland

How to Water

Water slowly and gently so that it will go to the tree roots and not into the gutter. There are several ways to water a young tree.



Photo from the Sacramento Tree Foundation

Hose Method:

Use a very slow stream, just enough to wet the soil under the tree, but not enough to cause run off. A steady, very slow water stream for about 20 minutes once a week will be enough. It helps to keep a little wall of soil around the base of the tree (called a berm) 12 or more inches away from the trunk, for this purpose. Don't use a nozzle, because the strong blast of water will gouge holes that will later dry the roots out.

Bucket Method:

Using the pot the tree came in, line it with a plastic trash bag, place next to the tree, fill with water, and poke a small pinhole in the bag through one of the drainage holes to allow the water to stream out very slowly. Fill the bucket to the very top with water once a week. Reuse the bag each week, but replace it if you notice the water is coming out so quickly that the water is running off instead of soaking into the soil.



Photo from Friends of the Urban Forest



Water Bag Method:

Commercial water bags available at retailers make the watering process simple and easy. Merely zip the bag up around the tree trunk or a nearby stake, fill with water once a week, and the bag will slowly release it over the course of several hours.

In very hot or windy weather, a tree may need more water than usual. If a tree gets too dry, it wilts, and the leaves lose their shine, droop, burn around the edges, or may fall off completely. If a tree begins to show any of these signs, check the soil around the tree and if dry, water again. Alternatively, do not give the tree extra water if the soil is overly saturated. Too much of a good thing could make it sick!

MAKE IT EASY TO REMEMBER

A good way to save yourself worry about whether you've watered the tree on time is to get in the habit of doing it at the same time or on the same day each week. You may find it helps to mark an "X" on your calendar when you're done, or setting a weekly reminder on your smart phone or online calendar.

Protect Trees from Chemical Poisons

If you or your neighbors are working with paints, paint thinners or removers, motor oil, brake fluids, or any other such chemicals, please follow Alameda County's disposal instructions and make sure

they do not get poured on the soil; they will poison the soil and very possibly kill the tree. Additionally, these chemicals pose hazards to water quality if improperly used. For proper disposal methods of toxic chemicals, please visit www.stopwaste.org/hhw, or call (510) 891-6500.

Protect the Tree Bark

Just under the surface of the bark is the “plumbing system” that the tree’s life depends on, so be careful not to cut or scrape it. When working around the base of the tree, please use caution not to hit the tree with your lawn mower or a string trimmer. Commercial trunk protectors are available from retailers to protect your tree from such damage without restricting the growth of the trunk. Additionally, do not allow grass to grow up to the base of the tree trunk. Trees prefer not to have grass or other plants growing near their trunks. See the section on mulch below for more information.

Staking

If you need to repair the support stakes, tie the tree loosely enough that it can sway a bit with the wind, and don’t use anything thin (like wire) that could cut into the bark and strangle the tree as it grows. (Bicycle inner-tubes, strips of old tires, old garden hoses, commercial tree ties, or other broad straps are safe to use.) The stake provided is reusable, please call after two to three (2-3) years for an inspection to see if the tree is stable, and is able to stand on its own.

A single stake (nursery stake) near the trunk is **only** a good idea with very thin trunks. It often makes the wood of the trunk weak and may rub the bark off where it touches. If kept, the nursery stake and green ties should be removed when the tree is strong enough support itself, typically less than one year after planting.

Pruning

Structural pruning is important during the first 3-5 years after planting to prevent a lot of corrective pruning later in a tree’s life. Please see the [ISA’s *Trees are Good* publication “Pruning Young Trees”](#) at www.oaklandtrees.info.

Oakland’s Tree Maintenance Section will only prune trees that pose risk of causing property damage or are otherwise in an emergency situation. Please contact the Public Works Call Center to report hazardous trees: (510) 615-5566 (M-F, 8am-4:30pm), opwcallcenter@oaklandnet.com, or [SeeClickFix](#).

Residents are discouraged from do-it-yourself tree pruning on mature street trees, as incorrect pruning can injure and potentially kill a tree in addition to making it look ugly. Property owners who wish to prune a City street tree need to hire a state-licensed tree contractor with \$500,000 of liability insurance and fill out the [Prune Your Own City Tree Guidelines](#) form.

Tree Well Maintenance

Keep the soil or mulch level of a tree well at the same grade as the sidewalk in order to prevent tripping hazards.

Weeds and Other Plants

It is important to keep fast-growing weeds and large plants away from young trees because they will compete with the tree for available water. Alternatively, small, shallow-rooted flowers or succulents a few feet away from the trunk of the tree are not problematic.

Mulch

Applying 2-4 inches of organic mulch around your tree will provide it with a variety of health benefits, including weed suppression and improved soil conditions. Mulch holds moisture, keeps the ground around the roots cool, and it will add nutrients to the soil as it breaks down over time. Inorganic mulch materials, such as gravel or rocks, will not break down and add nutrients to the soil. Shredded wood is the best mulch to use, but bark chips, tree leaves, and grass clippings are also suitable organic mulch materials.

The diameter of the mulched area should be about the same diameter as the tree canopy, or larger if the tree is very young (generally 3-4'). Do not directly apply mulch on the trunk of the tree. The area of the trunk just above the root flare is susceptible to rot if covered by mulch, soil, or anything else that can hold water. Keep mulch about 6-12 inches away from the trunk.

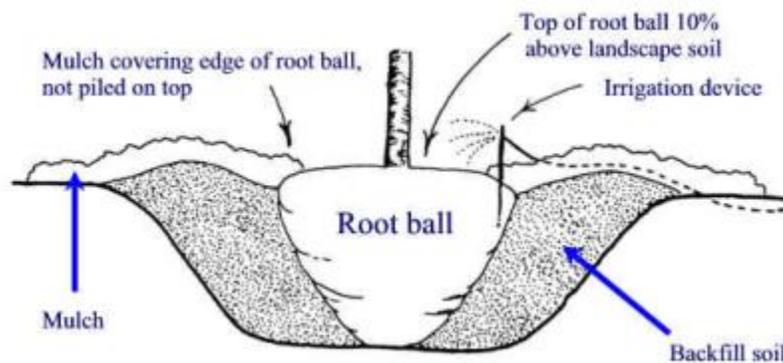


Image from the Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute's "Tree Standards & Specifications."

Leaves and Tree Debris

All trees drop leaves here and there, but deciduous trees typically put on a colorful show in autumn before losing all their leaves over the course of a few days to a few weeks. Most of the time, leaf debris does not pose a problem, but large leaf piles during rainy weather can cause a slipping hazard for pedestrians or block storm drains. Please remove large piles of leaves from the sidewalk and storm drains before rainstorms to prevent problems. Otherwise, sweeping or raking leaf debris is a matter of personal choice.

Oakland Public Works | Tree Services

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