

Community Forestry Assistant



Newsletter

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Northwest
Management, Inc.

TREE CARE AFTER PLANTING

Arbor Day has come and gone for 2007 and we all look forward to watching our recently planted trees grow for years to come. Unfortunately, many of our recently planted community trees have a much lower survival rate than the small native trees planted in the forest in late fall or early spring. There may be several reasons for this; chief among them are that trees planted in a community setting are larger, often non-native,

and are planted in harsh, man-made environments. Community trees are therefore much more susceptible to planting shock, stress, and damage from people than trees growing naturally in a forest environment. So what can be done to increase the chances of your newly planted tree surviving and thriving? Two primary things; one, make sure the tree receives adequate water the first few years until it can become established and two, protect the tree from damage by lawn care activities.

WATER, WATER, WATER

An important thing to remember is that the tree lost a lot of roots in the transplanting process and all its remaining roots are in a very restricted area. It is important to concentrate your watering efforts on this "root ball," although it is also helpful to water the surrounding area to encourage new root growth beyond the root ball.

If natural rainfall equals an inch of water every week, additional water may not be needed. However, when natural rainfall drops below that amount, as is the case in Idaho all summer long, start giving the tree some water. Don't just rely on lawn sprinkling to provide adequate water to your young trees - it usually isn't enough (though in some cases can be too much). A good rule of thumb to follow is to provide 5 gallons of water per week per every inch of stem caliper (trunk diameter measured 6 inches above the ground on young trees).

There are several techniques for proper "deep-watering" of trees including:

- Installation of a drip irrigation system
- Building up a berm around the outer edge of the root-ball to provide a "well" area. Fill it up with water that will slowly soak in.
- Coiling soaker hoses over the root-ball area
- Allowing a garden hose to slowly trickle water onto the target area
- Filling and placing a five-gallon bucket, with four very small holes drilled into the bottom, over the root ball.

To preserve soil moisture place 2" - 3" layer of mulch over the root area. Taper the depth of mulch so that there is no mulch within 6" of the tree trunk. Keep the soil moist but not constantly soaked; overwatering will cause leaves to turn yellow and/or fall off. Water trees deeply at least once a week, barring rain, and more frequently during hot weather. Watch your tree's "body language." When leaves droop and wilt, a tree is telling you it does not have enough water available to the roots. Continuing watering until mid-fall, tapering off for lower temperatures that require less frequent watering. However, giving your trees a good drink after dormancy, but before the ground freezes will help provide it needed water during the winter, when roots are actively growing.

TREE PROTECTION

Younger trees, even once established, may be subject to a weekly lawn care onslaught from lawnmowers and the even more egregious "weed-whacker". Bumping into the base of a tree with a lawnmower or whipping it with trimmer line can cut through the bark, damaging the cambium layer and thus shutting off this growing lifeline between the roots and the leaves. The most obvious solution is to keep the equipment away from the base of the tree. Mulching around the base of the tree not only helps retain water, but it also avoids the problem of having grass to trim next to the tree. If the tree must have grass growing next to its base, try using a protective plastic cover around the base, but be sure to remove it before the trunk grows into it. These guards are available commercially from most home and garden stores. Be sure to also remove staking materials after the first year.
