

Safe Zones – a Must!

Providing safe zones are essential for trees. Giving trees some space reduces competition with turf and keeps away lawn equipment, such as weed whips, which can be detrimental to trees. It's a win, win situation: you don't have failing turf around trees, the trees themselves are not stressed from competition and you don't have to waste the time to be very careful when maintaining around them. If you are not careful when using turf equipment, you can girdle them to the point of no return. When girdled, the tree is unable to circulate essential water and minerals picked up from the roots and also unable to move sugars down to the roots, which will lead to decline. Knocking off the bark and weakening the tree also makes an ideal point of entry for pests and diseases. So why not create a safe place for trees?



STOP THE VIOLENCE

There are many ways to create safe zones for trees. The most common safe zone would be providing a mulch ring around the tree. A ring of organic mulch will not only keep string trimmers away, it will help to retain water and give extra nutrients. A mulch ring to the drip line or beyond (see illustration) would be ideal, but realistically cannot always be achieved. Community Canopy recommends mulch rings to extend minimum 18" Canopy recommends a minimum radius of 18" or 36" diameter circle around the tree.



Another way to create safe zones for trees is to incorporate them into landscaping beds or borders. In landscaping beds, trees are away from the turf and not an obstacle in the turf. Beds with drip irrigation are also beneficial for trees since their requirements for water are much different than for turf.

If you absolutely must grow turf up to the tree, there is a product on the market to protect tree trunks. This "trunk protector" comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. The long pieces of tubing or wrap are do not recommend since they trap in moisture causing rot, can be an inviting place for pests and when the trunk is covered, the tree cannot optimize photosynthesis. The trunk protector that makes the most sense is a small plastic tube 9" tall with a slotted design which allows airflow around the tree. This guard is flexible to expand to 4" and some have tabs to allow additional coils to be added as the tree grows. Be careful that the protector fits well. If it is loose around the tree, it may move due to the action of weed whips, allowing damage to the tree trunk. Similarly, a protector that has become too tight can restrict growth and also damage the tree.

Remember, providing a safe zone for trees is a must. In the end, your trees will thrive and maintenance around them will be a cinch.