

TAKING CARE OF YOUR YOUNG TREE

Trees for Oakland - a project of Oakland Parks & Recreation Foundation
Website: TreesForOakland.org
Phone: 510-969-0185
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Thank you for taking on a new tree (or more than one) at your home or business! Your tree is part of Oakland's urban forest, but it needs your care, especially in the first few years.

WATERING

Most of your care will involve watering the tree. Even if a tree is supposed to be "drought-tolerant", it needs you to give it water for 2-3 years or more, until it grows enough roots to survive the dry season without help.

Watering Ring ("berm" or "donut"): We have formed the soil into a raised ring (or just a "C" shape if the ground is sloping) to hold water at the tree's roots. Pour water gently inside the ring (or at the uphill side of the "C"). It can make a little puddle until the soil absorbs it. If the ring gets broken or you see water leaking outside the ring, you can reshape the soil so it holds water again.

Clay soil and overwatering: Many sites in Oakland have heavy clay soil that drains slowly. If you have clay soil, you may be able to water every 10-14 days instead of every week. Too much water can be as bad as too little. The leaves will turn brown and fall off, which might make you think you're not giving enough water, and the problem will get worse if you give it even more. Before you are thinking of watering again, stick your finger 2" into the ground near the tree, and don't water if it feels wet.

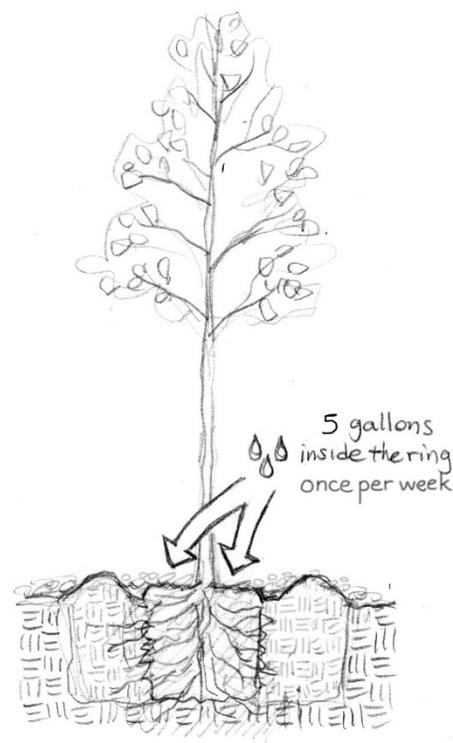
The first day: Our planting team waters thoroughly, at least 10 gallons. You can give the tree another 5 to 10 gallons of water the next day. But if the water from the first day hasn't drained yet, don't give it any more.

Summer / dry season (May to October): Give 5 gallons at one time, once per week, for two or even three years. This is better than giving it 1 gallon every day. Pour it all around the trunk so all the roots get wet. Mark your calendar for the same day each week, so you don't forget. Even in our drought, trees are a wise use of water; try saving the warm-up water before you shower and give it to the tree each week.

Winter / rainy season (November to April): If we got at least 1/2" of rain in the past week, you can skip watering this week. But if it has been more than a week since the last rain and the soil feels dry, give 2-3 gallons this week.

MULCH (WOOD CHIPS)

We have put a layer of organic-rich compost and a layer of mulch (wood chips) over the rootball, like the leaf-litter in a natural forest. These layers insulate the roots from heat and cold, reduce evaporation of water, smother weeds, and provide the ingredients for healthy soil. If you see that the mulch has been disturbed, just move it neatly back into place. Don't let mulch or soil touch the base of the trunk ("root crown"), because wet bark can rot and eventually kill the tree. Just brush it away from the trunk.



WEEDS AND TRASH (bad), OTHER PLANTS (good)

Weeds: Please pull grass or other weeds growing inside the watering-ring (berm). They take water and nutrients away from the tree. Pull by hand or with simple tools if you can, since weed-whackers can accidentally cut the tree's bark and hurt it.

Trash: Please pick up trash around your tree. A clean tree-well shows that someone is caring for the tree, but litter often invites people to litter even more.

Additional Plants: Please do plant flowers or other plants outside the ring.

STAKES

Nursery Stake: Trees grow better if they can sway in the wind, but some young trees don't have a strong enough trunk, and some parts of Oakland are just dangerous for young trees. If we have left the trunk tied to a nursery stake (wood or bamboo), please ask us before you decide to remove it.

Steel or Wooden Stake: The screw-tipped steel "Reddy-Stake" is the City of Oakland's standard for supporting new trees along streets; the rubber strap should circle the trunk loosely. Sometimes we install 1 or more wooden stakes around the tree, especially in yards, parks, and high-vandalism areas. Leave the stake on until the trunk of the tree is at least 3" thick (probably about 3 years). If you think the tree no longer needs the stake, tell us and we'll pick it up.

PRUNING

Every street-tree needs corrective pruning after a few years, but some fast-growing species need it in the first year. If you know proper pruning techniques, you may remove suckers, prune a small broken branch, or prune a small branch that interferes with the sidewalk or street. Ask us if you want to learn how. Don't remove every leaf sprouting from the trunk, and don't cut a big branch without getting an expert's advice. In theory, the City of Oakland is responsible for pruning, so please contact the Public Works Call Center (510-615-5566) if you think your tree needs substantial pruning.

PROBLEMS?

Please tell us if you see any of the following problems. Most trees do just fine, but we can troubleshoot.

- The leaves are turning yellow or brown but it isn't autumn and/or the tree isn't deciduous. It is probably a matter of too little or too much water.
- Lots of ants, aphids, or other insects are crawling on the tree, especially if they are chewing or disfiguring the leaves. We may be able to suggest a solution. Pesticide should definitely be a last resort.
- The tree was bare all winter, and it is May or June but the tree still doesn't have any new leaves on it. Some species naturally leaf out late, but this might be a sign that the tree is ill.
- The tree is leaning or bending a lot and you're concerned. We might restake it, splint it, or prune it.
- Low branches are blocking the sidewalk or the street. We can prune them off.
- A large branch or the main trunk is broken. We can prune it back to a clean cut or (in the worst cases) we might suggest replacing the tree entirely.
- The steel stake is damaged or missing, but we planted the tree less than three years ago. We'll replace it.
- The crossbar of the stake has become detached or broken. We'll reattach it.
- The strap or tube for the crossbar is so tight that the tree is being strangled. We'll loosen it.

