



Lesson 4- Tree Care & Maintenance

Key Points

- Watering and mulching are the most important tree care and maintenance steps to keeping your tree healthy so that it can protect itself against possible future stresses.
- Apply a layer of mulch up to 4 inches deep around your tree in the spring and fall. Mulching helps retain water, reduce evaporation and prevent competition with weeds and grass.
- All insects and diseases play a role in our urban forest ecosystem. The roles they play can range between supporting other wildlife as a food source, pollinating flowers, breaking down plant matter so it is digestible for other organisms and returning nutrients to the soil. A healthy and well protected tree will be less susceptible to stresses from pests and diseases.
- A healthy tree can generally withstand one stress at a time, with the ability to recover. The decline spiral in a tree happens when multiple stresses push a tree beyond recovery. Stresses can include:
 - not enough or too much water
 - damage from construction
 - pollution
 - pests and diseases
 - competition from lack of resources
 - lack of growing space
 - insect attack
 - vandalism
 - improper pruning
- Keep a close eye on your tree for signs of stress so that you can take action right away to prevent further decline in health.

Mulch in the spring and fall:

1. Before laying down the mulch, spread a thin layer, up to one inch, of compost around the base of the tree, try to avoid touching the trunk.
2. Apply a layer of mulch up to 4 inches deep using natural mulch materials in a doughnut-shape around the trunk and spread it out as far as the branches reach.
3. Do not pile mulch against the trunk as this can cause the bark to rot and encourage wood boring insects.



Water Regularly

1. Water your new tree approximately twice per week beginning early spring and continuing until late fall for at least 2 years.
2. Check the soil moisture in the top 2 inches of mulch to see if your new tree needs watering. If it feels dry to the touch, you should water your tree. If it still feels moist, wait a couple more days to water.
3. Place a hose without a nozzle at the base of the tree and water at a slow trickle for approximately 20 minutes. Water should be applied over the entire root area (the area under the mulch) and adjacent planting area, not just the base of the tree.
4. If the water begins to pool, immediately stop watering and lower your watering time.
5. If available, use a soaker hose which will allow water to slowly seep over a larger surface area.

Safe Ways to Combat Pests

- Find out what the pest is by using the provided online resources. If you are uncertain, hire a professional arborist to diagnose and treat your tree
- Attract natural insect predators in your yard
- Use soap and oil sprays
- Prune the affected area
- Remove the affected plant material and/or change tree care practices
- If animals are chewing on the bark of your tree, use thin wire mesh to create a tree guard around the stem. Don't let the guard touch the trunk of the tree.
- If you know which critters are the culprit, their preferred grass and shrubs can be planted near their point of entry to your yard so they will feed on those plants first.