

Forest Management Techniques—Landscaping: Basic Tree Care

Watering by the Seasons

Summer:

Water with two inches of water every week. If rainfall during the week does not supply enough water, you should make up the difference.

Trees must get watered deeply to fully saturate the roots. A surface application only waters the competing grass and doesn't do the trees any good. When you do water use a lawn sprinkler or a hose with a nozzle. Apply the water to the ground directly below the branches of the tree, and for large trees, water well outside of this area.

Mulch can conserve water – 3 - 4 inches of mulch is adequate

Morning watering is best

Late in fall:

Continue to water through fall like you have all summer long. Tapering off is no longer recommended.

Water considerably in late fall before the ground freezes to a depth of at least 12 inches (might require several inches of water)

Water from the trunk to past the drip line

Winter:

When little continual snow cover and extended time above 40°F, water mid – January until spring.

Extended warm periods water as often as twice a month in February, March, and April

Water in mid-day so water soaks in before possible freezing at night, avoid creating a solid layer of ice

Spring:

Do not fertilize with nitrogen any other time than spring (never before Father's day). Use a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10. Best to get a soil test. Ornamental trees rarely need fertilizer unless there is a visual deficiency.

Conifers - branches with winter damage, don't prune until new branch buds have had chance to sprout (late April early May). The tree might grow out of it.

Tree can regrow needles, though a full complement may take 3 years

Tree and Shrub Protection

Newly planted evergreens and smooth and dark bark deciduous trees need to be protected from the intense winter sun that rises and sets low in the horizon. This intense sunlight can cause sun scorch in evergreens and it can also cause sun scald in deciduous trees. Sun scald damages bark and the tissues below and usually occurs on the west and south side of deciduous trees. The sun warms the trunk, causing the cells to metabolize during warm, sunny winter days. When the nighttime temperatures plummet, the cells freeze and burst causing damage not only to the bark, but often to the whole tree.

Consider planting a row of deciduous tree on the sunny and windward side of conifers to help protect from warm/cold cycles of winter – Bare branches provide some shade from direct and reflected sunlight.

Another alternative for newly planted evergreens: standing pallets on end, putting up snow fence or even burlap tied between two fence posts. The idea is to protect the evergreens from the sun, while allowing some air movement.

For deciduous trees with smooth or dark bark, it is best to wrap the tree with tree wrap or use any of the many types of trunk guards to protect the tree. Wrap or attach the guard up to the first branch before the first of the year. Be certain to remove wraps or guards in the spring. You also can paint the tree with white latex paint to reflect the intense light.

Pruning

Winter, most commonly late winter, is the best time to prune most trees and shrubs. When deciduous trees are dormant it is easier to see the branching habit and it makes it easier to cut and remove the unwanted branches. Winter is also a better time because there are fewer bacteria and fungi around that can get into the wounds caused by pruning. The exceptions to winter pruning are spring flowering ornamental trees and shrubs. These usually set their flower buds in the summer. Pruning in winter will only remove the flower buds. It is best to prune spring flowering ornamental trees and shrubs in the late - spring, just after they are done flowering.

Sources:

Colorado State University Extension – Fall and Winter Watering, Fact Sheet No. 7.211.

Montana State University Extension – Do you have Winterburn on your Evergreen?, Toby Day, Extension Horticulture Associate Specialist.

Montana State University Extension – Winter Care of Trees and Shrubs, Peter Kolb, Extension Forestry Specialist.



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