

How to care for trees

Staking

If needed, tree support can be provided by staking, which stabilizes the root ball and supports the tree until it can stand alone. Over time, progressively reduce the stake in height to a point where the trunk does not bend when unsupported. This adjustment should occur after the tree is in full foliage (bare trees may appear sturdier without the weight of foliage). Bare root trees, grown in nursery fields rather than in containers, may not require staking. With a few exceptions, most trees will be properly developed within two seasons and able to stand without staking. Often, short stakes (18" – 24") without ties are left or placed around the tree to protect against mechanical damage from mowers and string trimmers.

Pruning and Training



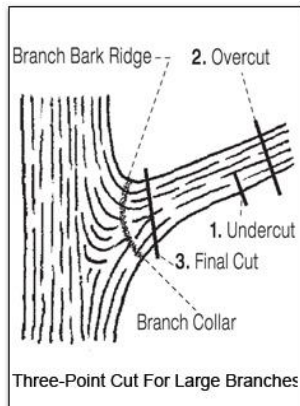
Tree Davis volunteer using loppers to prune lower branch on young street tree

Safety:

- Ensure your tools are sharp
- Use gloves
- Wear close toed shoes

Proper pruning is essential to ensure a structurally strong, attractive, and mature tree. Pruning needs vary by species and not all trees should be pruned in the same manner. For shade trees, define a main stem or leader, with the scaffold branches spaced vertically and radially on the trunk. This spacing also varies by species: medium sized trees should have 6" – 8" between permanent limbs, while large trees should have at least 18" of vertical separation. When removing a branch, the pruning cut should be in branch tissue just beyond the bark ridge and the collar. If removing limbs, a good rule of thumb is to remove those limbs that are 1/3 size diameter of the main trunk or parent branch to which they are attached.

For larger branches, you can use a three point cut to avoid the weight of the branch cracking or damaging the trunk at the point of connection.



Watering



Tree Davis volunteers water a newly planted street tree

If your new tree is planted in a lawn, keep turf cleared at least two feet from the trunk. Lawn irrigation does not replace regular watering of your tree. Trees require infrequent, deep watering. Use caution not to over-water or over-saturate the soil, as this may cause root rot.

Watering is generally not necessary during wet winter months. In spring, wait to begin watering until 3-4 weeks after new growth begins. This will encourage deep root growth by avoiding the over-saturation of surface soil. As the weather warms, water weekly for two months and then every two weeks for the rest of the dry season. Irrigating once every 2-3 weeks the second and subsequent years should be adequate. Remember to increase the amount of water, while watering on a less frequent schedule as the root system develops.

Additional Care



Volunteers remove grasses within 12" of the trunk of the tree in order to decrease competition for necessary water and nutrients key to the success of the young tree

- Eliminate competitive grasses, weeds, and ground cover within 12" of the trunk.
- Maintain 3-4" of mulch around the base of the tree, but not against the trunk where rot can occur.
- DO NOT use string trimmers near trees/trunks — it can be lethal.
- Remove or shorten vigorous shoots along the trunk, but maintain small branches to strengthen the trunk and protect it from sunburn and vandalism.
- Inspect regularly for insects and disease.
- Ensure your tree is properly staked.