



Fact Sheet #8—Tree Planting & Tree Care

What is the best way to plant a tree?

Trees are generally available bare root, in containers, or with burlap wrapped root balls. All forms are best planted in early spring when still dormant, with fall being the next preferred planting time. Until the tree is planted, keep it in a cool location out of the direct sun. Water the trees to keep them moist until they are planted.

Bare root trees should be planted on small mounds within a planting hole that is dug wide enough to accommodate the length of the roots. If a tap root is present, dig the hole to the depth of the root. The hole should be backfilled with top soil up to the previous soil level once the roots have been distributed over the mound, packing the soil lightly to eliminate air pockets.

For Containerized trees remove the container and plant in a hole that is the size of the longest roots in the container, which may need to be unwound from the root mass. If the roots are densely matted the root mass should be sliced vertically with a sharp knife to separate the roots. Backfill with top soil to the original depth of planting and pack lightly to eliminate air pockets.

On burlap wrapped root balls untie and fold back the burlap before planting in a hole that is considerably wider, but no deeper than the root ball. The sides of the hole should be wider at the top than the bottom and have sloped walls. Backfill the hole with the top soil to the level that it was originally planted and pack lightly to eliminate air pockets.

Spacing for a tree that will reach 14 m (45') or more at maturity should be 9 m (30')—12 m (40') between trees, half the mature crown width from a building, and 1 m (3') from a roadway or sidewalk.

How do you care for your new tree?

Your newly planted tree requires a lot of care in the first three years to ensure it gets an excellent start in life. The following are the most important elements in providing the best growth conditions for your tree.

Watering:

The amount of water a new tree requires depends on the type of soil it has been planted in. If the soil is clay based the tree will only require watering once or twice a week. If the soil is sand based more frequent watering will be necessary.



Tree planting in Weyburn as part of the Saskatchewan Urban Forest Diversification Program in September, 2000.

Mulching:

A newly planted tree requires a great deal of moisture. Mulching with wood chips will increase the amount of moisture the tree retains, often doubling the tree's growth rate in the first few years. The minimum mulched diameter should be 60 cm (2 ft.), while the mulch depth should be no more than 10 cm (4 ins) and not less than 5 cm (2 ins). The chips should be kept 10 cm (4 ins) away from the base of the tree to prevent damage from rodents. Chips should be aged six weeks before using.

Pruning:

A new tree should only be pruned if it was damaged during transport. After the first winter it should be checked for dead or dying branches, which should be removed. Do not remove lower branches of a new tree as these are the main source of the tree's food in its early years. Make sure to also remove any tags or wires from the tree as these will eventually damage the tree.

Wrapping:

Tree wrapping should only be done on species that are susceptible to sun scald otherwise wrapping can do more harm than good by sheltering borers that penetrate the bark. The bark also tends to remain overly moist under the wrapped area.

Protecting the base from lawnmower damage is something that should be done. Weeping tile works well as a base protector. Simply cut a piece 15 cm (6 ins) long and split it down the side. Check the base regularly for signs of girdling or rubbing. If this is occurring remove the protective sleeve.

Staking and Guying:

Staking is very important to a new tree, as it prevents the tree from being dislodged by the wind and it allows the tree to establish a firm footing. The guying material should be flexible yet supporting. Suggested materials to use are pantyhose or lamp wick. Make sure the guying is wide enough so it isn't cutting into the tree. The guying should be removed sometime into the second year after planting.

Fertilizing:

Fertilizing a new tree is usually not necessary as most soils in Saskatchewan contain enough nutrients to support a newly planted tree. If the soil condition has been changed by construction consult a professional to determine the type of fertilization required.



How do I care for a mature tree?

Mature trees can benefit from much the same care appropriate for younger trees. The following are suggestions of what you can do.

Watering:

A good watering is probably in order if you notice the leaves on your trees drooping. Trees benefit more from an infrequent thorough soaking than a more frequent shallow watering. Water 2.5 cm (1 in) per soaking.

Fertilizing:

Applying fertilizer once every two to three years is sufficient for most mature tree species. This can be applied on the surface or through feeding holes that are dug into the soil at the drip line. The best time to apply fertilizer is in the early spring.

Pruning:

It is recommended that pruning be done by a certified pruner every 5 to 7 years. If storm damage occurs, the tree should be pruned as soon as possible. Elm trees **must not be pruned during the annual pruning ban** (April 1st to August 31st) as the smell of the freshly pruned elm wood attracts the native elm bark beetle which carries the Dutch Elm Disease (DED) fungus. Elm wood must be immediately disposed of according to the DED regulations. Keep these guidelines in mind when trees are being pruned:

- Prune dead or dying wood to keep the tree healthy.
- Prune for size and shape.
- Any branches that are crossing or rubbing should be removed.
- No more than one third of the tree should be pruned in any one growing season.
- Prune to allow light to reach the centre of the tree.

Tree Banding:

Banding trees for canker worms with a sticky substance like Tanglefoot will keep your trees healthy. Canker worms are particularly attracted to Manitoba maples, American elms, and fruit trees. Band your elms by the end of August and you may also capture native elm bark beetles as they move to the base of elms to overwinter. You should reapply the sticky layer and tighten the bands in the spring. Remove your bands by May 15th of each year.

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