

Many recommended practices for newly planted trees have changed in recent years. Here are some tips that will give newly planted trees a better chance to survive and thrive.

Mulch Properly

Mulching is the most important post-planting practice you can do to improve the health and vitality of your landscape tree. Wood-chip mulch can nearly double growth in the first few years by protecting tree roots from extreme weather, preserving soil moisture, eliminating grass and weed competition and

preventing damage from mowers and weed trimmers. Apply a layer of wood-chip mulch 2-4 inches thick to a diameter of 3-4 feet. Don't mound mulch around the base of the tree.

Prune Sparingly

Prune trees and shrubs at planting time only to remove branches damaged during handling and transplanting. Lower branches manufacture critically needed food and should not be removed. Inspect plants after a year and remove dead and crossing branches. Trees do not need to be pruned to balance the root with the top.



Newly planted trees need water, but be careful not to overwater them. They need no more than an inch of surface water each week.

Don't Overwater

Water is critical to the success of any tree or shrub planting. However, overwatering is a major cause of tree failure in many Nebraska communities. Heavy clay soil can severely restrict the natural percolation of water. Newly planted trees should receive no more than an inch of water a week during the growing season. Don't water more than two or three times a week. Running automatic irrigation systems 20-30 minutes daily will severely damage the root system and can kill a tree.



Left: Newly planted trees benefit from a 2-4 inch layer of wood-chip mulch. The mulched area should be 3-4 feet in diameter or to the edge of the tree's branches, called the drip line. If there are several trees in an area, creating a mulch island is an effective and attractive option to protect them from being injured by yard maintenance equipment.

Wrapping Isn't Recommended

For many years it was recommended that tree trunks be wrapped to protect them from sun scald or freeze injury, rodents, mowers, weed trimmers and other assorted problems. However, research has shown that tree wraps may not always protect trunks from damage and, in fact, can cause, hide and increase problems. The problems associated with tree wraps can be very damaging, so routine use of wraps is not recommended.

Wrap a tree trunk only if a nursery guarantee requires it, if the tree species is susceptible to winter sun scald damage on the trunk, or during the time that the tree is being transported and needs protection from mechanical damage.

If wrapping is used, keep it on the tree only during the first winter, then remove it completely the following spring. Any wrap left on the



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tree during the growing season may girdle the tree as the trunk grows in diameter.

Use a Trunk Guard

Damage from rodents, mowers and weed trimmers can be prevented by using plastic guards. A simple, yet effective, guard can be made using perforated drain tile cut in 12-inch sections and split down the side so it can be placed around the tree trunk. Monitor plastic guards regularly and remove them before rubbing or girdling problems occur.

Staking & Guying

Staking and guying systems are used to stabilize the root ball of a newly planted tree. Materials should be strong enough to provide support, but flexible enough to allow some movement. Guying materials should have a broad surface at the point of contact with the tree to prevent damage from rubbing. Plastic horticultural tape or canvas webbing that's at least 1-1/2 inches wide make good guying materials. Monitor the tree throughout the growing season and adjust the materials if necessary to prevent trunk girdling. The materials typically are removed at the end of the first growing season. Any trees that do not establish

Left: A mesh guard will protect the tree trunk from damage from animals and mowing or weeding equipment. It is preferred to a trunk wrap, which may hide problems or make them worse.

Right, top: Staking sometimes is required to stabilize newly planted trees. Materials touching the trunk should have a broad, smooth surface and be flexible enough to allow some movement.

Right, middle and bottom: Serious damage, such as these girdled trunks, can occur if stabilizing materials are not removed after the first year.

within a year will likely never establish a strong root system.

Don't Fertilize

Fertilizers are generally not recommended at planting time since most Nebraska soils contain sufficient levels of nutrients for newly planted landscape trees. Once trees are established, determine their nutrient needs based on their condition and a soil analysis.

This series is based on a previous storm damage series researched and written by David Mooter.



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