

### **Proper Tree Watering**

Last week I talked to you about how to correctly plant your tree, so I thought that talking about caring for the water needs of your tree would be a good next step. I already know what many of you are thinking: "Why do I need to read an article about how to water a tree?" The fact is that proper tree watering is another one of those things that commonly goes overlooked, and it is vital to the health of your trees. A little bit of effort and TLC on your part in this area can pay great dividends with the establishment and longevity of your tree.

Proper watering is crucial to your tree at the time of planting and the following years. In the first few years, the root system is trying to reestablish itself. This is particularly true with trees that have been dug from the field, ball and burlap trees. When trees are dug from the field, they lose about 70% of their root system. What this means is that the tree has to absorb water and nutrients in 30% of the area that it was previously able to.

One important fact to keep in mind is that watering your tree is not like watering your lawn. Many people think it is, and your tree suffers from this. Whether you have in-ground irrigation or use sprinklers, your tree is not going to be watered in the manner that is most beneficial to it.

When you water a lawn, it is typically often and for a short period of time. This is what grass needs to thrive. This is the exact opposite of the way that you want to water a tree.

Trees benefit from long, deep, infrequent watering. This helps to establish a deep, spreading root system for your tree. It also allows the ground to dry out, keeping the soil from

becoming saturated and oxygen deficient for a prolonged period of time. A good rule of thumb for watering your tree is 5-10 gallons of water at each watering for every inch of diameter. Newly planted trees will need water every 7-10 days, and small and medium trees will need water 3 times a month without adequate rainfall.

Keep in mind that this is a long, soaking watering. You do not want to turn your hose on high and be done watering in a couple of minutes. When you do this, only a little amount of water soaks into the root system, while a majority of the water runs off into another area. It takes roughly 5 minutes to produce 10 gallons of water when your hose is running at medium pressure. Use this figure to determine how long to water each tree.

Here is what I like to do when I water. I turn the hose down on low to medium, or better yet, buy a watering wand. By using a wand, you can adjust the rate of flow without having to run back to the spigot. It also allows you to increase the volume of water when you are watering larger trees.

When it comes to the actual watering of your trees, it is pretty basic. With newly planted trees, I simply turn the hose down to a steady, slow stream, and set it down around the base of the tree. Move it around once and a while, so that the whole root system and some of the surrounding area is deeply watered. It is important to water more than just the root system on younger trees. You want to keep the surrounding area moist, which helps initiate root development and spread into these new areas.

Another good watering device is a GatorBag. It is a green bag that holds 20 gallons of water that you wrap around

your tree. Tiny holes on the bottom slowly release the water over 10 to 15 hours. One bag will fit up to a 4" diameter tree, and you can zip 2-3 together for larger trees. They do an excellent job of slowly and deeply watering your tree.

Remember, do not plant your tree and just forget about it. A good watering routine for the first few years will pay off handsomely in the future. Trees are not grass, and need to be watered differently. Long, deep, infrequent watering is the answer. Try it, and see how well your trees respond.