



LAWRENCE Landscape

Watering Trees & Shrubs

Trees and shrubs require deep, infrequent watering. It's important to know that just because you have a sprinkler system, this is not necessarily going to do the trick for your wonderful new trees! When you are watering, remember that you want to water roots, not limbs, leaves, etc. Where grass has shallow, fibrous roots, your trees and shrubs have (or should have) deep root systems. Newly planted trees are more susceptible to drying out than established trees. It may take up to 3 years for your trees to become established, depending on the size. The smaller the caliper of the tree (diameter of the trunk), the more quickly it will establish roots!

Check soil moisture. Using your finger, poke a hole near the base of your tree. If it is dry 2-3 inches down, give it a drink. If your soil is very compacted and heavy, use a rod. Very dry soil will resist penetration and indicate the need for watering.

For newly planted trees:

Too much or too little water can result in tree injury. But plants are like people- they can dry out a number of times, but only drown once! Do not overwater. Again, trees and shrubs are not like annual flowers or grass. The ideal amount of water is 1" every week on the base of the tree. This is hard to measure though- a good rule of thumb is a slow, steady stream onto the root area (by the base) for 20-30 minutes, once every 7-10 days. Check soil moisture first! As well, the larger the tree, the more water it needs. Continue this for the growing season. Signs of too much water include leaf yellowing and drop. If it has been particularly wet (like some of our springs and summers), water much less frequently. When the cold weather begins in mid-fall, taper off watering. Trees and shrubs use much less water in cooler temperatures.

A nursery tip:

watering once a month during cold months can help less mature and less hardy plants survive a tough winter.

For established trees: Trees love even moisture. This means that in times of drought, even established trees need to be watered. Try to keep the top 8-10" of soil moist around the dripline of the tree. How do you figure this out? Use the rod test or just poke your finger in the soil to test it out. To water most efficiently, put the hose around the dripline and make sure the water is percolating down into the soil. This might mean slowing your hose down to a slow drip to ensure deep, even moisture that doesn't run off!

Watering Tools:

You can use any hose or nozzle you have. However, try a soaker or drip irrigation system. They discharge even, slow streams of water directly to the root zone of your trees and shrubs. To prevent evaporation, put mulch 3-4" deep around the base of the tree; use compost or bark mulch. This allows plants to use all of the water more effectively. When using drip irrigation, always test soil moisture first since there's no easy way to tell how much water is delivered. Better safe than sorry!

When to water:

Water in the morning, before the hot sun can start the evaporation process. Evening watering, while a homeowner favorite can cause problems because soil may stay moist too long, allowing growth of harmful bacteria/ fungus, etc.