



TREE MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES FOR NEWLY PLANTED TREES

This information is provided by Authority of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The three-year maintenance guidelines, outlined below, provide the minimum activities that should be conducted to help ensure the successful establishment and long-term health of newly planted trees. To ensure that newly planted trees thrive, it is essential that tree care activities begin immediately after planting. Research shows that it takes three years of care for newly planted trees to become well established.

Tree planting and care resources

- American National Standards Institute – [American Standard for Nursery Stock Z60.1](#)
- International Society of Arboriculture – [Trees are Good](#)
- U.S. Forest Service – [Tree Owner's Manual](#)
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources – [Tree Planting and Care Tips IC4108](#)

Water

- **Year 1 (year tree is planted.)** Water deeply at the time of planting and once per week (or more frequently if soil is dry) from April – November. Use a trowel or screwdriver to dig down 6 inches below the surface of the soil to check soil moisture – if dry increase watering frequency. A general rule is to provide five gallons of water per caliper inch of trunk. For example, a 3-inch caliper tree would need 15 gallons of water. Water should be applied slowly to allow it to soak into the soil and reach the root ball.
- **Years 2 and 3.** Water every other week (or more frequently if soil is dry) from April – November. Follow Year 1 watering guidelines.

Mulch

- **Year 1.** Place a layer of mulch 3-4 inches deep in a ring around the tree **but not touching the tree trunk**. The area should be as wide as possible. Use organic mulch, like wood chips or leaves, avoid using treated, dyed, or synthetic mulch.
- **Years 2 and 3.** Check that mulch is in place in the spring, and re-mulch as needed following the Year 1 guidelines.

Tags and twine

- **Year 1.** Remove all tags and twine from the tree to prevent future girdling of the trunk and branches.

Prune

- **Years 1 and 2.** Tree pruning during Years 1 and 2 is not recommended and should only be done if necessary to remove branches that are crossing/rubbing, damaged, or blocking sight lines. Follow tree pruning guidelines from the International Society of Arboriculture's Trees are Good and the U.S. Forest Service's Tree Owner's Manual.
- **Year 3.** Begin young tree pruning to improve tree health, form, and structure. Use Years 1 and 2 tree pruning resources.

Stake

- **Year 1.** In most circumstances, tree staking is not necessary. If staking is needed, follow the specifications in the Michigan DNR's Tree Planting and Care Tips (IC4108). All staking and ties should be removed after 1 year.
- **Year 2.** Remove any stakes and ties if tree was staked in Year 1.

Monitor

- **Years 1, 2 and 3.** Assess trees for damage caused by mower/weed whips, vandals, and/or animals. Perform corrective actions, such as, ensuring mulch is in place to prevent mower/whip damage; pruning broken limbs caused by vandalism; or installing tree guards to prevent animal damage.
- **Years 1, 2 and 3.** Monitor trees for insect and disease problems. Consult a [forester or arborist](#) if a problem exists.

Fertilize

- **Years 1 and 2.** Do not fertilize. Fertilizer applied to newly planted trees can excessively dry roots, causing burning, which can damage the tree.
- **Year 3.** Trees may be fertilized, if needed. Consult a forester or arborist before fertilizing.