

# UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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### Tree Care After Planting

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Many trees are planted each spring. Once the right tree is selected for the location and planted at the correct depth, the next steps are correct watering, mulching and staking. Practices to avoid at planting and usually for the first year after planting are fertilizing with nitrogen and pruning.

### Watering

Water is critical to root establishment. Even so, more young trees die from too much water than from not enough. This is especially common in denser clay soils or in over-irrigated lawns. Too much water suffocates roots because they require oxygen as much as they need water.

As a rule, maintain a consistently moist soil about eight to 12 inches deep and be sure to moisten the soil outside of the root ball. This will promote root growth outward into surrounding soil. The amount of water and frequency of watering needed to do this depends on the type of nursery stock selected, the soils texture, tree species planted, and weather conditions.

There really is no standard answer such as water once a week with a certain amount of water. This might be too much on a clay soil or for a red oak tree, but too little on a sandy soil or for a river birch.

As a general recommendation, the Nebraska Forest Service recommends watering trees immediately after planting and again the next day. Then water three days later and once again three days after that.

From then on, the key is to monitor the soil around the tree and irrigate as needed. During dry summer spells, balled and burlapped (B&B) trees should be watered about once every seven to ten days if planted in clay soils and about once a week if planted in sandy soils.

Sprinkler systems may provide sufficient water up until summer heat arrives. During the hottest, driest parts of summer, a newly planted tree is likely to require additional water. Container-grown trees will dry out faster than B&B trees. Monitor trees and soil moisture closely.

## **Mulch**

Mulch protects tree roots from extreme temperatures, eliminates weed and grass competition, conserves soil moisture, and keeps lawn equipment away from tree trunks. However, too much mulch can trap moisture at the base of the trunk and negatively impact root growth.

If there is too deep of a mulch layer, roots will grow into the mulch. These roots tend to dry out and die during the heat of summer and are killed by cold winter temperatures. This adds additional stress to young trees trying to recover from transplant shock.

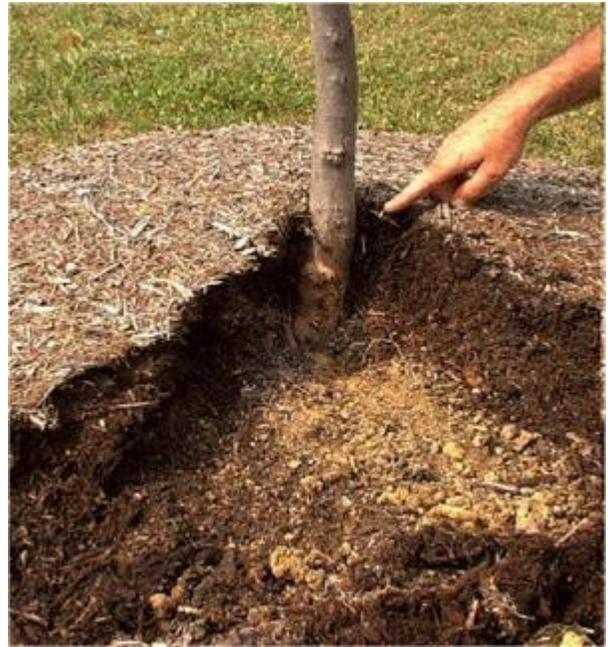
When mulching, use organic mulch like shredded wood. Mulch the tree at least out to the trees drip-line (ends of the branches). Next to the trunk, keep the mulch only one inch thick. Outward, towards the edge of the root ball or at the trees drip-line, mulch can be up to four inches deep but no deeper.

## **Staking**

Staking should be done on trees that are tall and leggy and planted in high wind areas. Keep in mind trees are staked to anchor the root ball, not to eliminate movement of the stem or tree canopy (branches and leaves). The goal is to prevent the root ball from rocking and tearing new roots.

When staking, use materials that will not rub against the trunk and create wounds. Do not stake too high on the tree and only stake a tree for one year after planting. If large trees are moved with a tree spade, they may require staking for two years.

*Source: Nebraska Forest Service*



*Excess mulch application negatively impacts tree health.*