

For Immediate Release

Don't Plant and Run—Young Tree Maintenance

CHAMPAIGN, IL (May 2012) – Spring is now in full bloom, and thanks to Arbor Day and countless other tree-planting initiatives across the globe, you may be the proud owner of a brand new tree. It may be small now, but with a basic understanding of tree biology, you can help it grow to its full potential through proper pruning and maintaining its health and structure. This, in turn, “will enhance the aesthetic and economic values of your landscape,” says Jim Skiera, Executive Director of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Here are three simple tasks you can perform to ensure you’ll enjoy your new tree for years to come:

Stake the tree, only if necessary. Studies have shown that trees establish more quickly and develop stronger trunk and root systems if they are not staked at the time of planting. However, staking may be required when planting bare root stock or planting on windy sites. Stakes may also offer protection against lawn mower damage and vandalism. One or two stakes used in conjunction with a wide, flexible tie material on the lower half of the tree will hold the tree upright and minimize injury to the trunk, yet still allow movement. It is important to remember to remove support staking and ties after the first year of growth.

Mulch the base of the tree. Mulches are available in many forms, and when spread around the base of a tree, it holds moisture, moderates soil temperature extremes, and reduces grass and weed competition. The two major types of mulch are organic and inorganic. Inorganic mulches include various types of stone, lava rock, pulverized rubber, geotextile fabrics, and other materials. Inorganic mulches do not decompose and do not need to be replenished often. On the other hand, they do not improve soil structure, add organic materials, or provide nutrients. For these reasons, most horticulturists and arborists prefer organic mulches. Common organic mulches include leaf litter, pine straw, shredded bark, peat moss, or composted wood chips. A 2- to 4-inch (5- to 10-cm) layer is ideal. More than 4 inches (10 cm) may cause a problem with oxygen and moisture levels. Piling mulch right up against the trunk of a tree may cause decay of the living bark. A mulch-free area, 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 cm) wide at the base of the tree, reduces moist bark conditions and prevents decay. “All things in moderation’ should be a homeowner’s mulching motto,” says Skiera. “As beneficial as mulch is, too much can be harmful in more ways than one.” Keep the soil moist, but not waterlogged. Water trees at least once a week, barring rain, and more frequently during hot, windy weather. When the soil is dry below the surface of the mulch, it is time to water. Continue until mid-fall, tapering off as lower temperatures require less-frequent watering.

Limit your pruning. At the time of planting, pruning should be limited to dead or broken branches. All other pruning should be withheld until the second or third year, when a tree has recovered from the stress of transplanting. You should always have a distinct purpose in mind before making any pruning cut, because every cut has the potential to change the growth of the tree. Pruning cut location is critical to a tree’s growth and wound closure response. Make pruning cuts just outside the branch collar to avoid damaging the trunk and compromising wound responses.

-more-

For Immediate Release

Improper pruning cuts may lead to permanent internal decay. If a large branch must be shortened, prune it back to a secondary branch or a bud. Cuts made between buds or branches may lead to stem decay, sprout production, and misdirected growth. When you are finished pruning, most experts recommend that wound dressing not be used. Despite any claims otherwise, research has shown that wood dressings do not reduce decay or speed wound closure and rarely prevent insect or disease infestations. The tree will compartmentalize the wound on its own over time.

Completing these basic steps will maximize the likelihood that your new tree will grow and thrive in its new home. When questions arise regarding your tree, be sure to consult your local ISA Certified Arborist or a tree care or garden center professional for assistance.

About ISA

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Champaign, Ill., is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research and education around the world. To promote the importance of arboriculture, ISA manages the consumer education web site, www.treesaregood.org, which fulfills the association's mission to help educate the public about the importance and value of proper tree care. Also, as part of ISA's dedication to the care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees, it offers the only internationally-recognized certification program in the industry. For more information on ISA and Certified Arborists, visit isa-arbor.com.

