

Spring Time Tree Care Tips

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Spring time's sudden burst of flowers and early leaf growth brings a welcome relief to winter time's cold harsh weather. It is at this time that we know it won't be long until our urban landscape will once again be in its full glory. Here are four tips you can use to give your tree a helping hand this spring.

- 1) **Complete New Tree Planting.** Many will say that you can plant a tree any time of the year --- which is true. But what experience and research shows is that the best time to plant a new tree is during late autumn and winter when the tree is partially dormant. This is less traumatic to the tree and allows the roots to get a head start before the coming growing season. If you still have tree planting to do, go ahead and get your tree in the ground now so that the tree will have as much time as possible to establish roots and increase the chances for survival.
- 2) **Refresh Mulch.** Next time you walk in a woods, look at how trees grow in the forest and you'll find the ground covered with leaf and organic litter and little or no grass. Mulch in the urban landscape helps recreate these same natural conditions where trees can thrive. By maintaining a two to four inch layer of organic mulch, you'll help your tree roots stay moist, cooler, and healthy.
- 3) **Make "Limited" Pruning Cuts.** There are only four reasons to prune trees in the spring. These are to remove dead, dying, diseased, or unsafe limbs. If none of these conditions occur, then don't prune. During the spring, trees use valuable stored energy to make new wood, produce leaves, and reproduce. Your goal should be to limit interference with these vital processes. Once we get "saw-happy" with our pruning, we begin to work against the tree's energy system. Allow the tree to develop a full and healthy crown.

- 4) **Consider “Limited” Fertilization.** There are very few cases where applying fertilizer is necessary for a tree’s health. And where fertilization is needed, it is usually used to address a specific nutrient deficiency based on a correct diagnosis. The best strategy is to plant the right tree species on the site and then to manage the critical root zone with a layer of organic material. An exception to this rule is with nitrogen. Because it leaches rapidly, especially in sandy soils, it can be a limiting factor. Surface broadcast of nitrogen is the easiest and cheapest application method, especially if the soil is not compacted and there is little ground vegetation. Check with your County Extension Agent for more information on fertilizing urban trees.