

Caring For Your Trees

Your new trees are pretty hardy but could do with a little love and attention to make sure they get the best start and develop into happy, healthy mature trees. The more you do for the trees now, the more they will give back to us when they are fully grown. Caring for your trees is also a great way to get outside, get active and start enjoying them! Below are our top tips to give your trees some Tree-L-C.



Mulching

Once the weeds and grasses are removed, mulch is a great way of keeping them down. Bark chips or straw are readily available, cheap and can be obtained from most DIY stores. Alternatively you could use leaves that have fallen off trees on the school grounds. The mulch needs to be spread around the base of each tree at a depth of around 2 inches. The mulch suppresses weeds and provides a nutrient boost to the trees that will help them in the long run.



Weeding

The grasses and ground plants growing around your trees will be in competition for food, water and space particularly in the first few years after planting. If left untended these plants will swamp the trees, reducing their growth and increasing the likelihood of them failing. Ideally each tree will have a 'weed free' area around them of at least 50cm in diameter. Tall vegetation that could fall and smother the tree can be cleared or cut away by hand or, if possible, pulled out completely. This weeding work is a good way to get children outdoors during school hours. It is also important to remove any weeds and grasses from within the tree shelters or spiral guards. All of this weeding work is best done during the spring and summer when the grasses will be at their most vigorous.



Watering

Your tree should adapt to the conditions in which it is planted. If you have planted your tree in the ground, watering shouldn't be necessary unless there is an unseasonably dry period of weather. If the trees have been planted for less than 6 months then they will need watering after 3-4 warm days. If you have planted your tree in a pot, it will need watering more regularly as the roots only have access to the moisture within its pot. Watering the trees can be another great way to get kids outside and interested in nature! You could combine watering with a fun activity such as a scavenger hunt or minibeast safari!



Tree Protection

Shelters and spirals protect your trees from being eaten by wildlife. The canes and stakes that go with them help support these barriers and keep them upright. If these are blown off or bent over they should be replaced or straightened to make sure the trees remain protected. Accidental damage from mowers and strimmers can be fatal to young trees. To prevent this damage, hand weeding should be sufficient to them alive and healthy. It is also a good idea to ensure the planted area remains marked off to make sure that everyone knows trees are there. You could use brightly coloured stakes or canes to do this.



Larger Trees

Any large trees that have been planted at your school will be supported by stakes and strapping. It's important to keep an eye on how tight this strapping is in case it starts to restrict growth or damage the bark. If the strapping looks too tight (i.e. pressed against the bark with little slack) then it can be loosened to give the tree more room to grow. Once fully rooted your larger trees will thrive without watering, until then they are relying on you for support. The bigger the trees the greater the volume of water it will need. You should use enough water to saturate the soil around the roots but not so much that standing pools of water appear. Once a year whilst watering you can add in a sugar feed to give their growth a boost. Details about using plant feed can be found on the RHS website: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/>



Fruit Trees

Depending on the variety and rootstock of your fruit tree, it may grow vigorously and in many directions. To keep it a manageable shape and size, it may need to be pruned. Typically this is done in the winter time, when the trees are dormant but there are more specialist techniques and methods for pruning to promote certain types of growth or fruit production. In-depth guides to pruning can be found at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice>

