

TREE CARE: WATERING & MULCHING EASTMORELAND TREE COMMITTEE



Along with pruning, **watering** to provide water to roots and **mulching** to conserve soil moisture are the most important things you can do to extend your tree's health and lifespan. These activities are now more important than ever as our climate becomes warmer and drier in the summer and fall.

Watering young trees: for the first 5 years after a tree is planted, it needs to be watered weekly during dry weather (including extended dry periods in the fall and winter). The rule of thumb is 15 gallons of water once a week delivered by gator bag (first photo below) or a 5-gallon bucket with several small holes drilled at bottom (second photo below) to ensure that the water soaks in deeply, encouraging the tree roots to grow deeply as well.



Free gator bags are available upon request!

Watering mature trees (except for established native oaks): During dry months, mature trees need water as well, about every 2-3 weeks. First, check if the soil around the tree is dry about 6 inches down, using a screwdriver or soil probe to loosen the soil. If the soil is dry and crumbly:

- Water with a gator bag, 5-gallon bucket with several small holes drilled at bottom, or hose set to a slow trickle so the tree is watered deeply.
- Water until the soil is moist, not soggy, about 6 inches down.
- You may need to move the bucket or hose to different areas around the tree.



Mulching: Mulch is any material that is spread over the soil surface to provide the following benefits:

- Conserves soil moisture by preventing evaporation during dry weather.
- Protects soil, plant roots, and soil organisms from temperature extremes.

- Improves soil structure and reduces soil erosion and compaction from rain and irrigation.
- Suppresses weeds and weed seed germination.
- Defines a grass-free zone around the tree, preventing damage by lawn mowers and edgers.
- And, as organic mulches break down, they return nutrients to the soil to feed the plants and soil microorganisms.



How to Use Mulch:

- Select a mulch. The best materials for mulching around trees are wood or bark chips (above left), pine needles, or fine gravel such as ¼-10 gravel (above right).
- Remove weeds from an area 3-4 feet in diameter around your tree or to the outermost edge of the tree’s canopy (the “dripline”) – whichever is greater. The dripline will move out as the tree grows.
- Apply 2-4 inches of organic mulch or 1-2 inches of gravel to the cleared area.
- Pull mulch back 3-5 inches from around the tree trunk. This prevents the lower trunk from remaining moist and creating a favorable environment for insects, fungi, or small rodents.

Mulching Trees: <https://extension.psu.edu/mulching-landscape-trees>