

## **General Guide to Watering Trees and Shrubs**

Remember! These are guidelines. The exact amount of water to apply each time and how often is based on the site specific factors such as:

- soil conditions at the site versus the soil in the container or root ball
- sun/shade, wind, weather conditions (drought/heavy rain)
- ground slope, root competition along with proper planting practices.

Water for plants is a double-edged sword. While it is essential that all plants have sufficient water, too much or too little water is a deadly enemy.

If you are unsure of the ability of your soil to properly drain, dig a one-foot deep hole in several potential sites in a landscape. Fill them with water and examine how much water stays in those holes compared to other areas in the same landscape. Clay soil drains slowly, porous sandy soil drains quickly. Adding organic matter to the soil will improve drainage in clay soil and increase water retention in sandy soil.

### **Newly planted Trees and Shrubs:**

- Always water plants well before planting. If the soil is dry, fill the planting hole with water and let it drain before planting. You can soak the plants in its container in a bucket full of water until you see no more air bubbles. This ensures that the root ball is well saturated.
- Newly planted trees or shrubs require more frequent watering than established trees and shrubs. When watering, ensure that the water penetrates the soils all the way to the root ball. They should be watered at the time of planting and at the following frequency:
  - Water once every other day for two weeks following planting. On non-watering days, soil should retain moisture, but not feel soggy. The best way to check soil moisture is sticking a finger into the soil about 4-5" below the surface.
  - Continue watering during the growing season, taking into account any rain.
  - If you are experiencing drought, or a location that experiences extreme summer temperatures you should likely be watering more than the above frequencies. If your soil is sandy and doesn't retain water (as opposed to clay soil that absorbs and holds water) you can also increase the amount and frequency of watering.

- Avoid frequent light watering. It is much better for your plants to water deeply and with wider longer intervals.
- Be careful not to overwater. Many people have inadvertently drowned newly planted trees by watering them too often. Water should soak in quickly; your plants should never sit in a puddle of water for an extended period of time. This can lead to root damage.
- The best time of the day to water plants is early morning. This reduces the amount of water evaporation and is a more efficient use of this resource. Watering during the heat of the day increases the amount of water lost to evaporation by as much as 40%. Late-day, overhead watering increases the chances of some plants being infected by diseases.
- Always direct water at the bottom of the plant's stem rather than its leaves. This means the water will go direct to where the plant needs it most.
- Once you have the plant placed, proper irrigation is necessary to make sure that the roots are able to expand and take hold. Lawn sprinklers are never sufficient irrigation for plants.
- We highly recommend adding mulch immediately after planting. After the water has soaked in, spread protective mulch 2 inches deep in a 3-foot diameter area around the base of the plant, but not touching the trunk. Mulch typically is an organic material spread on the soil surface to protect roots from heat, cold, and drought, and to provide nutrients to plants as it decomposes.

**Additional tip for all Evergreens:**

- Evergreens – trees or shrubs that have needles or leaves that remain green on the plant through the winter – should be deeply watered in the fall before the ground freezes if rain has been insufficient. Evergreens continue to lose water during the winter, especially when the temperature is above 40°F and on sunny, windy days. If the soil is dry, the plants may become desiccated, turn brown, and die, even if those symptoms don't become obvious until spring.