

Guide For Watering Newly Planted Trees

- Water stress, from either too much or too little water, is the leading cause of poor growth, wilting, browning leaves, and even plant death.
- Water needs vary by tree type, time of year, temperature, and soil conditions. Understanding how your soil drains or retains moisture is key. Planting season typically runs from April through October.
- Always water at the base of the tree where the roots are. Soaker hoses or hand watering are the most effective and efficient methods, while sprinklers do not provide deep enough watering.
- Water deeply once a week rather than lightly and frequently. This promotes deeper root growth and allows the soil to properly dry between waterings.
- Newly planted B&B trees have a limited root zone due to root loss during digging. Water enough to fully saturate the root ball, then allow it to dry. Daily watering can suffocate roots, preventing water from reaching the leaves. Roots need oxygen to grow.
- As a general guide, a 2-inch caliper tree needs 8 to 10 gallons of water per week, while a 2.5-inch tree needs 10 to 15 gallons. For hand watering, a hose typically delivers about 4 gallons per minute, making it easy to estimate watering time.
- One inch of water penetrates about 6 inches in clay soil and 8 to 10 inches in average soil. When using a soaker hose, place a small can under it and water until it fills to 1 inch. If rainfall provides 1 to 2 inches in a week, additional watering is usually not needed.
- Check soil moisture before watering by probing 4 to 6 inches deep with a trowel or screwdriver. If landscape fabric and stone are present, they may trap moisture. Adding small openings can help improve drainage.
- Mulch helps retain soil moisture, but should be kept a few inches away from the trunk to allow excess moisture to escape and prevent rot.
- Trees typically take 2 to 3 years to establish. Roots begin expanding into the surrounding soil during the second year, at which point watering can extend out to the drip line.
- In late November, water thoroughly before the ground freezes. During dry winters, supplemental watering may be needed on days above 40°F, especially for trees and evergreens.
- For reliable plant care information, consult trusted sources such as university extension services, the Missouri Botanical Garden, Morton Arboretum, or Chicago Botanic Garden.