



KEEPING YOUR TREES HEALTHY:

WATERING, MULCHING AND WEEDING

Trees on school grounds often struggle to stay alive. This fact sheet provides basic information on how you can help keep your trees healthy.

APPOINT A SCHOOL TREE ADVOCATE

The School Tree Advocate is responsible for making sure that new (and older) trees on the school ground are properly cared for. He or she can be a student, parent, staff member or neighbour who commits to monitoring the trees for a specified period of time.

WATERING

Using native species that are uniquely adapted to local conditions greatly reduces your watering needs. Under ordinary climatic conditions, they don't require regular watering once they are established. But they will need extra care and attention in the first few years and during periods of drought.

When To Water?

- Newly planted trees need consistent watering, especially in the summer, for approximately two to three years until they become established.
- Trees planted in planters or raised beds need to be watered three times per week.
- For trees planted in soft surface areas, (i.e. turf) water twice a week.
- For trees planted in hard surfaces, (i.e. asphalt) water three times per week.
- Established trees will require deep watering during periods of drought, as they will be particularly thirsty during this time.
- Local rainfall typically isn't enough to soak an entire root ball, so you should view rainfall as a supplement to your watering schedule. Watering during rainy days also prevents evaporation.

How Much Water?

The amount of water your trees will need depends on several factors which include; weather conditions, species and soil type (clay, loam or sand). Here are some guidelines to help you determine how long to keep the hose on:

- Water deeply and thoroughly. This stops wasteful runoff and encourages deeper root development, making trees more tolerant to dry spells.
- Aim to get the entire root ball of your tree wet. Use a garden hose turned on at a rate where water penetrates the soil rather than running off. To see how much water you need, let the water seep for an hour and then dig down in the soil at the edge of the root ball and see how far the water has penetrated. Run the hose until the whole root ball is wet—depending on your soil type and water pressure, this could be anywhere from 15 minutes to three hours. Keep track of this time and use it as a benchmark for future watering.

See a sample watering schedule, 'Watering Schedule Sign-Up Sheet', at: www.evergreen.ca/en/lq/tdsb-guide.pdf, pages 82–83.

Check out the THE BUCKET METHOD for a cool watering idea.



Maintenance Tips

- Keep a maintenance log to track what's been done and provide suggestions for the next maintenance session. (*Learning Grounds Guide*, p. 36)
- Make sure summer maintenance volunteers are thanked in the school newsletter or at a volunteer celebration.
- Refer to *Hands for Nature: A Volunteer Management Handbook* at www.evergreen.ca for great ideas on recruiting volunteers to help maintain your project.





MULCHING

Mulch is magic. It keeps roots cool during hot months, maintains an even soil temperature during cold months, retains moisture, protects roots from compaction caused by foot traffic and protects tree trunks from lacerations by lawn care equipment. Mulch also reduces erosion, prevents runoff, improves the organic content of the soil and keeps weeds down.

- Spread the mulch anytime. Remember to top it up every year to 6" or 15 cm.
- Have mulch delivered when the ground is dry so heavy trucks don't damage your site.
- Mulch around trees and shrubs to a depth of 6" or 15 cm, 40" (1 m) out from the trunk for newly planted trees and out to the drip line for older trees.
- Use Tub-Ground mulch. If this type is not available in your area try finely ground bark or ground-up leaves.

See the MULCH IS MAGIC fact sheet for more mulching tips, how much to order and mulching activities for students.

WEEDING

Fortunately, by mulching you have greatly reduced your need to weed, however there will still be tenacious ones that come up, so plan ahead for regular weeding.

- Try to pull out weeds by hand before they have gone to seed, making an effort to get the entire root system. Weeds will rob your trees of precious nutrients and water.
- Weed after a rainfall or watering. Wet soil makes it much easier to pull out the weeds.
- Rake the mulch back over the root zone to cover exposed soil.
- Drop non-seedy weeds where you have removed them, as it helps return nutrients to the soil.
- Compost weeds if they haven't gone to seed to avoid sending them to landfill.
- If weeds have gone to seed, dispose of them in tightly secured black plastic garbage bags.
- Invite a native plant organization or a local expert to come and help you identify your weeds.

The Native Plant Database on our website at www.evergreen.ca/nativeplants can provide you with a list of names and photos of invasive species.

PRUNING

Pruning should be done as necessary to ensure the health of your trees and shrubs and the safety of the community. Minor trimming of dead wood can be done anytime by the greening committee, however pruning of established trees must be done by a professional arborist or forester.

DEALING WITH DAMAGED TREES

By keeping your project in good shape, people will show more respect for it than if it looks damaged. Remove broken limbs and replace damaged trees and plant material right away. Student art projects such as signage and painted fencing will also deter vandals.

Cool Mulch Ideas

- Consider having your mulch delivered in the fall. Low mulch piles can become the base for small snow hills in the winter.
- In chilly weather, mulch will steam as it produces heat during the decomposition process. Take your class out and measure the internal temperature with a thermometer.



This tree requires pruning.