

# Summer tree care can help your landscape flourish

As the weather warms, plants and trees wake up from winter dormancy for the growing season. Just like your garden or flower bed, your trees require proper care to thrive and grow with minimal stress.

For small trees planted recently, remove any trunk wrap or other protection on your trees as early in the season as possible (make sure the weather is consistently above freezing, especially at higher elevations). Leaving trunk wrap on can allow moisture to accumulate around the trunk and, during warm months, fungal infections can grow.

If your tree is still staked, gently shake the tree to see whether or not it is stable in the ground. Ideally, a tree should feel fairly stable before removing the straps. If the tree still moves too much and needs to be supported longer, make sure the straps aren't tied too tightly; the tree

needs to be able to move a bit in the wind. Ensure that there is a big enough loop in the strap around the trunk. Straps that are tied too tightly can girdle and kill the tree.

One to two years after planting, a tree's root system should be developed enough to support the tree on its own.

## Mulch

For both large and small trees, check that mulch surrounds the tree. Mulch should be placed in a donut shape with no mulch touching the trunk. Mulch that touches the tree can cause wet spots that can introduce disease or weaken the tree.

Mulch is primarily used to help hold on to moisture, which keeps the tree from drying out too quickly. Mulch that has been spread out roughly 3–5 feet around the tree

helps to protect not only the shallow roots, but also shields the trunk of the tree from mowers and string trimmers. Mulch also helps to choke out weeds and grass that compete with the tree for moisture and nutrients.

Mulch comes in a wide array of materials, but the best types of mulch are large wood chips or coarse ground bark. Large wood chips are 2–4 inches in length. These materials are preferred, as the natural decomposition adds organic material to soil over time.

Rubber mulch or rock can help protect the trunk from mower damage, but may be less effective at retaining moisture or adding organic material. Chipped wood and ground bark provide numerous benefits, especially as the weather becomes very hot and dry.

Over time, mulch breaks down and is incorporated into the soil. For this reason, you will need to add mulch every couple of years. If any trees look like they have mulch volcanoes, carefully use a rake to pull that mulch away from the bark and evenly distribute it around

*Place mulch in a donut shape (left), not in a volcano shape (right). Mesh fencing around the trunk also protects it from rodents.*



Brian Sebade, UW Extension



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the tree. Mulch shouldn't be more than 4 inches deep; 2-4 inches is a good rule of thumb. Too much mulch reduces the roots' ability to absorb oxygen.

### Pruning

After checking the mulch around the trees, prune any broken branches caused by untimely snowstorms. Only make pruning

cuts on small branches, preferably with sharp hand pruners or a hand saw. Any major pruning cuts should be made in the dormant season to prevent excessive stress on the tree.

Be particularly careful if you are pruning fruit trees such as pears, crabapples, apples, or peaches. These species are susceptible to a bacterial pathogen called fireblight, which is spread through wounds and

can cause mortality in those species very quickly. Fireblight-affected branches can be pruned out in early summer to help control the infection. When pruning infected trees, tools should be disinfected between cuts using a household bleach diluted 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.

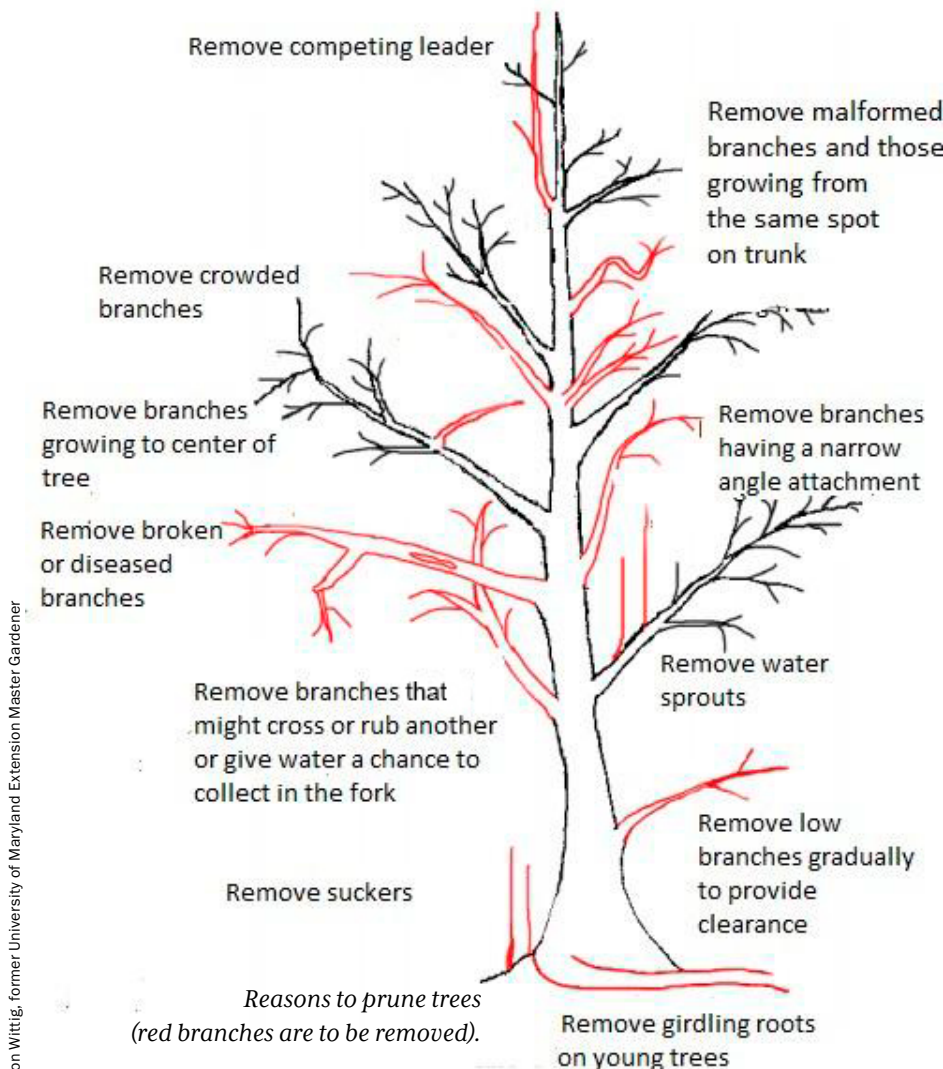
Visit <https://bit.ly/bb-correct-pruning> to learn more about proper pruning techniques. If you have questions, contact your local conservation district, UW Extension office, city arborist, local reputable tree care company, or state urban forester for professional advice.

### Irrigation

Proper irrigation is the most important summer tree care activity. Trees, on average, require 10 gallons of water per inch of trunk diameter per week for proper establishment. While all trees need water, trees that aren't yet three years old require more consistent watering and will not tolerate a drought as well as large established trees.

For small trees, watering close to the tree is most effective, but as trees grow larger, you will need to water out from the trunk of the tree to the edge of the canopy. Moving water away from the trunk encourages roots to spread out.

Make sure to water gently, but do not oversaturate the soil. Always check the soil in several locations



Don Wittig, former University of Maryland Extension Master Gardener

underneath the canopy of the tree to a depth of at least 6 inches. Pushing a long screwdriver into the soil can help you determine this—in most soils, the screwdriver will be harder to push once it hits dry soil. Soil that is too saturated will reduce the available oxygen.

Note that the symptoms of over-watering and under-watering manifest in the same fashion. Typically, leaves/needles start yellowing in both cases.

While watering with a hose is fairly straightforward, other products can help water infiltrate at a more constant rate around the root ball. Gator bags, Treegators, and tube irrigators zip or lie around the tree and can be filled with a garden hose. The bags have small holes in the bottom that help slow the water down so that less runs off the surface. A 5-gallon bucket drilled with numerous  $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch holes can serve the same purpose. These devices do not eliminate the need to check and water your trees, but they can provide a visual reminder to do so.

Summer in Wyoming puts great stress on trees, even if you care for them properly. While you are watering your trees or out enjoying your property, take note of any potential issues. Yellow leaves on branches while the other leaves are green, any abnormal growths, oozing

## Resources

If you would like more information on tree care, not just during summer, you can request a copy of the Wyoming Tree Owner's Manual from a Wyoming State Forestry Division district office. The manual can also be viewed online at <https://bit.ly/all-things-trees>.

on the trunk, red needles on conifers during the summer, or any dieback can be indicators of pathogens.

The sooner you find out what is affecting the tree, the more likely you will be able to take steps to help it recover or prevent the pathogen from spreading. For assistance, contact a local UW Extension office or another trusted professional.

For more information on selecting and caring for trees, visit the Barnyards & Backyards Trees & Shrubs page at <https://bit.ly/BBTreesShrubs>.

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*Watering bags and tube irrigators help water trees more efficiently.*



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