

Looking after your new tree

Watering

Drought stress is common with newly planted trees and shrubs. Even in a cool, wet summer, the rain rarely replenishes soil moisture stores fully. The soil may be dry around the roots even when the surface appears moist.

Dry, windy conditions are especially likely to lead to water shortages. With experience, it is possible to detect the dull, lifeless foliage indicative of drought stress but by then the tree has already been damaged. Ideally anticipate water loss, and irrigate to prevent damage.

Overwatering is possible, especially on poor draining soils and with automatic irrigation systems, which leads to rotting roots and symptoms similar to drought. If in doubt, dig down with a trowel to the side of the root-ball to see if the soil is beginning to dry before watering. The quantity required will vary with soil type but typically 30-50 litres per square meter (4-6 watering cans) each week in dry weather during the growing season will be necessary.

Weeding and mulching

Weeds, lawns and other vegetation intercept water before it reaches the roots of newly planted trees and shrubs.

- Keep a vegetation-free circle at least 1.2m (4ft) in diameter around the plant for its first three years to help avoid this problem.
- The circle can be kept weed free through hoeing or using a mulching mat.
- Laying mulch over this circle is also helpful, although take care to leave a collar of 10cm (4in) around the woody stems that is free of mulch, to prevent the risk of rotting the bark.

Feeding

Fertilisers do not need to be added at planting time, but can be used a season after planting if the soil is very poor or a boost to growth is required. However, if you are using mycorrhizal fungi (e.g Rootgrow) do not apply a fertiliser at all as phosphorus (found in general fertilisers and superphosphate) can suppress the fungi.