

 UI Extension Forestry Information Series

I Planted a Tree, Now What Do I Do?

Yvonne Carree Barkley

Many of you have probably take advantage of warm spring days to get out and plant trees. Whether you planted one tree in your backyard or 500 on your woodlot, these trees need post-planting care.

The two main reasons for seedling death are weed competition and insufficient moisture. Weeds compete with trees for moisture and nutrients. They should be removed from around trees for at least the first three years. A clean planting site will also remove the habitat of mice and gophers which can seriously damage seedlings. Insufficient moisture can be remedied by watering the trees well at planting and then once a week during hot weather. Water long enough for the water to penetrate the soil deeply. Stop watering one month before the average date of the first frost in your area.

Livestock, deer, elk, and a variety of rodents and other small animals can do considerable damage to seedlings. Fencing the entire planting area or around each tree, repellents, pesticides, and trapping are all ways to control animal damage.

Seedlings may be damaged by sun-scald when the main stems of young trees are suddenly exposed to intense sunlight. This can be prevented by lightly wrapping the trunks with white, durable paper or placing boards or plastic sun-shields at the base of each tree on the south or southwest side to provide shade to the lower stem.

To protect taller trees from wind damage, you can stake or install guy-wires to each tree. This will keep the tree in place while the root systems develop and encourage straight growth and good form. Stakes or guy-wires should be removed from the trees as soon as they are able to support themselves, usually after

one or two growing seasons.

Pruning should begin at planting. Prune off broken branches and thin multiple leaders to favor the best one. As the tree matures, remove basal sprouts and dead branches annually. Also thin closely spaced, touching or crossed branches and those that form narrow crotch angles. The longer you wait to begin this task, the larger the job will be! By pruning early, good, natural form usually develops after three or four years, greatly reducing the need for continued annual pruning.

Newly planted trees are not the only ones needing spring care. By continuing the care given to your seedlings you will insure the future health and vigor of your trees. Established trees, unlike seedlings, usually benefit from fertilization after two growing seasons or more. A general rule of thumb is to use one ounce of all purpose fertilizer for every foot of tree height. Apply the fertilizer in the early spring as soon as the soil is frost-free. Roots begin growing and absorbing nutrients long before the tree leaves unfold.

Annually monitor your trees for insect, disease, or pesticide damage. Use pesticides carefully and only when symptoms have been identified as a specific insect or disease problem that should be controlled chemically. Beware of weed and feed lawn care products that can contain herbicides that are deadly to your trees and shrubs. Trees planted close to agricultural areas are especially vulnerable to pesticide drift.

This information first appeared in Woodland NOTES, Vol. 3, No. 2.

About the Author: *Yvonne Carree Barkley* is an Extension Associate - Forestry at the University of Idaho.