

Practical guidelines for tree care

Do you care for your trees?

To get trees off to a really good start a few minutes of simple care, each year is all that is needed!

Weeding

Weeds (particularly grasses) are strong competitors for water and nutrients. It is essential to minimise this competition, especially in the early years when tree roots are being established. A one square metre **weed free zone** around each tree should be maintained for at least three years.

To create a weed free zone:

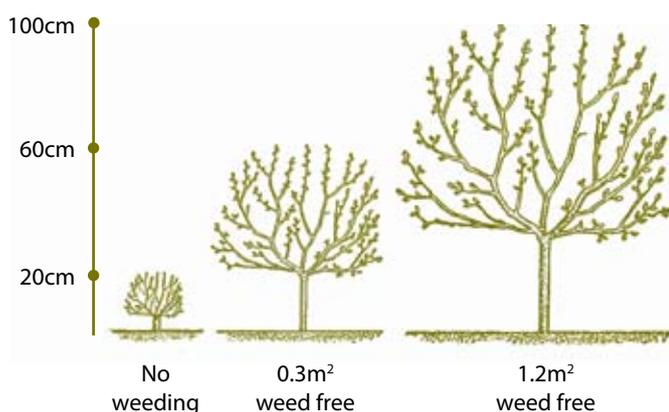
Either:

- **Uproot** all weeds and grass by hand.
- Surround the tree base with a **mulch**. This can be a plastic mat, rotted compost, wood chips or other organic material. It suppresses weed growth and helps the soil retain moisture. It can be added when planting or afterwards when the ground is wet.
- **Herbicide** applications are probably the most efficient and cost effective means of control but you should be fully trained and qualified before applying them. Seek advice to select the correct chemical for your situation.

Remember

It is the competition to the roots that matters - **cutting the grass is not enough**. Trees do not thrive and survive in mown lawns!

Fig 1.



Watering

If you decide to water your recently planted trees in times of drought, you must do so thoroughly and regularly. If you suddenly stop, the trees can go into drought stress very rapidly.

Water regularly or not at all!

Most water applied to the surface will evaporate or run away from the rooting zone.

The water that enters the ground will not penetrate as far as you might think.

Remember

It is the tree's roots that require the water.

On specimen trees consider installing an irrigation pipe around the roots when planting or inserting pipes into the ground near the roots. This ensures that water is used efficiently.

To stake or not to stake! That is the question!

The purpose of staking trees is to support the tree in the ground while the roots re-establish. It is not to support the stem! The stem must be able to move to encourage strong growth.

The decision to stake or not will depend on:

- the size of the planting stock;
- and how exposed the site is.

Staking (continued)

Planting stock up to 1.2m height (transplants, whips, etc.) should not require staking at all.

Planting stock 1.2 - 1.8m height (large whips) may need staking on exposed sites.

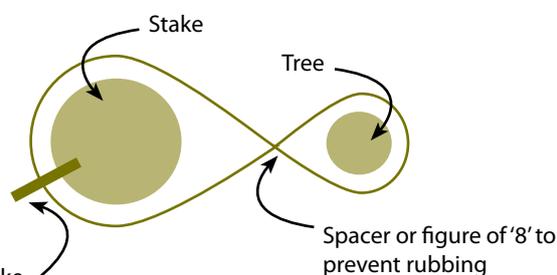
Larger planting stock over 1.8m height is likely to need staking except in very sheltered locations.

Remember

We recommend:

1. Low stakes, no more than third the height of the tree, as this allows the stem to flex;
2. That stakes are driven securely into the ground (before planting to avoid damaging roots);
3. That the tree is tied securely but not tightly at the top of the stake;
4. That a system is used that prevents the tree rubbing the top of the stake.

Fig 2.



Fix tie to stake
(NB needs to be adjustable)

Fig 3.

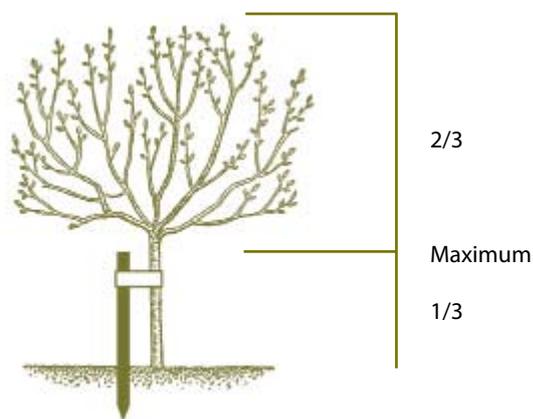


Fig 4.



Note

Occasionally after three to five years growing some trees, particularly fast growing conifers such as Monterey pine, may become unstable because the roots don't keep pace with the crown. A little help will enable them to overcome this problem.

It is worth considering (fig 4):

- 1 Thinning the crowns by removing up to half of the branches in the upper crown. This reduces the 'sail area' and keeps the centre of gravity low. This should be done as a matter of course with pines on very exposed sites after two growing seasons;
- 2 Firming the trees in the ground with your heel after strong winds;
- 3 Placing inverted turfs around the base of the tree to add weight; and
- 4 In extreme cases, support the tree with a stake and tie for a few years until the roots have caught up. Stakes should be driven diagonally into the ground to avoid damage to roots.

If the trees have stakes, ties or guards:

- Loosen the ties if tight to prevent strangling and rubbing.
- Consider reducing height of stake after first year
- Remove the stakes and ties after two years (spring time).
- Remove the guards and shelters after about five years.

Thinning

When your trees have been established for 10 - 15 years they may need thinning to promote well formed growth. Favour the long term broadleaf trees such as oak, ash, beech and chestnut by coppicing or felling some of the faster but shorter lived species such as common alder, birch and Italian alder. Most broadleaf species coppice (i.e. grow again from the cut stumps), the notable exceptions being Italian alder and beech (except when young).

Aim to remove trees which are poorly formed and unlikely to develop well or those competing with your favoured trees. Do not thin too late otherwise they will be more prone to wind damage and will have suppressed crowns. Thinning can be carried out progressively over many years. In a forestry situation, plantations are thinned about every five years.

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Based upon a leaflet first produced by "The Tree Council and The Forestry Authority".

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