

Keep Your Trees Healthy!

Albuquerque has the 3rd highest tree mortality rate in the nation (behind New Orleans, due to Hurricane Katrina, and Houston, TX). Numerous factors influence Albuquerque's tree mortality including: drought, lack of adequate irrigation methods, root girdling, and compact soils. The good news is that we can change that!



Some practical suggestions to keep your existing trees healthy:

- Watering needs to increase and move outward as a tree grows (moving with the growing root zone of the tree).
- When you first plant a tree it is good to water just outside the current root zone to encourage the roots to grow outward.
- Watering should cover a wide area around the tree, so lawn sprinklers are good for trees, but they are not a sufficient source of water. They mimic rain and can provide good volume and diffuse distribution to the roots.
- If you xeriscape around a tree, it will be important to make sure there are a number of drips installed all around the tree.
- Deep water around the tree 1-2 feet into the soil every other week from spring through early fall.
- When it is windy, trees will need more water due to the resultant evaporation.
- Trees generally do not need fertilizer.
- Trees do need mulch around them, preferably organic mulch. It provides important soil microbial activity, increases water holding capacity, and regulates soil temperature.
- Place mulch about a foot away from the trunk of the tree outward to the end of the drip zone in a circle around the tree.
- Try not to walk on the soil around a tree when it is wet, so that it does not get compacted.

When planting new trees:

- Purchase smaller, younger trees; they are easier to handle, cheaper, establish more quickly and grow more quickly.
- Inspect the tree in the nursery before you buy it; roots should come out of tree radially (versus in a circle due to the constraints of the pot – an indication the tree has been in the pot too long – you may be able to address by cutting off any roots less than 1” in diameter that encircle the root ball).
- Choose trees that are well suited to New Mexico's climate and have some drought tolerance to decrease the likelihood of stress and disease.
- Don't plant the tree too close to your house – it's important to imagine how the trees will look 10 years in the future. (And to think about whether you want roots pressing up against the foundation of your house!)
- Avoid black plastic, and “permeable” ground cloth around the trees – they make it difficult, if not impossible, for the tree to absorb diffuse watering, making it likely the tree will not survive.

- Set up a good irrigation system around the tree that can be pulled back and increased in volume as the tree's roots grow.
- Don't stake a tree for more than a couple months – staking prevents trees from developing roots that help them to develop stability.

Tree irrigation options:

- Drips encircling the tree are the cheapest option.
- Netafim spiraled under mulch is an alternative to spray irrigation, but it is expensive and takes a lot of upkeep.
- The website: <http://www.sprinklerwarehouse.com/Root-Watering-Devices-/7848.htm> has Deep Drip Watering Tree Stakes.
- Or, a cheaper, jerry rigged solution: Purchase about six feet of 6 inch irrigation pipe (has holes in it). Purchase three covers for the pipes. Cut the pipe into 3 pieces. Now dig three holes, 24 inches deep around the tree. Wrap the pipe with simple weed barrier and insert it vertically in to the hole, stick a piece of drip pipe with a 10 gallon end on it, put the cap on the upper end of the pipe and bury it. Every time your irrigation system comes on it will fill the pipe with water and slowly leach out in to the root system of the tree.

Trees use more water than grass – so watering for grass is not sufficient to keep trees healthy – so at minimum, water once each week for longer time period.

Keep those trees alive! They help prevent urban heat developing, create shade, habitat for birds, take in CO₂, produce Oxygen and provide relaxation.

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Most suggestions were made by Joran Viers, city forester, to the DOT garden at a recent workshop at the Desert Oasis Teaching Garden at Albuquerque Academy. For more information about free upcoming workshops at the Desert Oasis Teaching Garden contact Karen Temple Beamish at beamish@aa.edu. Or 505-858-8873.