

TREE MAINTENANCE & PRUNING

- **Watering**

All newly planted trees require heavy watering the first year to allow the roots to grow, usually weekly during the hot summer months and biweekly during the cool winter months. After the first year watering can be reduced to little more than what nature provides (about 25 inches per year in Cameron County). Too much water will kill native drought tolerant or xeric-adapted trees (xeric means low or deficient in moisture). These trees cannot tolerate standing in waterlogged soils for more than a few days at a time. Also regular light watering keeps the roots at the soil surface, which during especially hot, dry periods will cause your tree to undergo a severe stress resulting in the die-back of the leaves and twigs. The first year after planting, as your tree grows and the canopy spreads, watering your tree at the base should be stopped. Watering at the base promotes weak root systems that may allow the tree to blow over and may cause rot. Watering should occur at the drip line, under the outer ring of leaves where rainwater naturally drips off the tree. For established trees, occasional deep watering is the best, as it forces the roots deep into the soil, which protects them during hot, dry periods.

- **Mulching**

Mulching reduces weed growth, retains soil moisture, reduces high soil temperatures during the summer, and lessens soils compaction. A loose non-compacted soil is beneficial for water penetration and gas exchange around the roots. Mulch can be dried grass clippings; ground-up bark, branches, twigs and leaves; pebbles; or live shade-tolerant, xeric-adapted, ground covers. High moisture requiring ground covers, such a bermuda-grass, require more and frequent waterings than the tree needs and can cause the tree to develop a shallow root system. Be knowledgeable of the watering needs of the live ground cover selected.

- **Pruning**

Pruning should be avoided except to remove dead, dying or diseased branches. Remember many of our natives and xeric-adapted trees may drop their leaves when they receive too little water, which is a drought adaptation. If you suspect that the loss of leaves during the summer months is due to drought, try deep watering of the roots before removing the branch. However, pruning of low hanging branches may be necessary in order to aid walking under the tree. But, remove only the necessary branch to aid walking and to give the canopy balance, removing too many branches reduces the tree's value as cover for birds escaping cats and dogs. Although excessive pruning should be avoided, there are times when thinning of the canopy is necessary to provide light and air circulation to lower areas. If thinning of your tree is necessary, have it done right. **The right way is cutting branches at a crotch; the wrong way is topping.** Correctly thinned trees should look like the tree in the picture entitled: **Good Tree Pruning.**

Note: insert picture title “Good Tree Pruning”

Caption: **Good Tree Pruning**
(cutting a branching crotch)

Incorrectly thinned trees looks like the tree in the picture entitled: **Bad Tree Pruning.**

Note: insert picture title “Bad Tree Pruning”

Caption: **Bad Tree Pruning**
(Topping)

Do not allow topping (bad tree pruning) to be done to your tree. It weakens the tree. It is unsightly. It reduces the value of your tree and it promotes access for disease and pest insects. Topping promotes weak new growth that usually breaks in strong winds, and it is ugly. It is recommended that you hire a professional tree trimming service to thin your tree, but before you allow them to start cutting ask if they practice topping, if the answer is yes, find another service. Also ask the service to tell you the location of some trees that they have trimmed, like yours, that you can drive by and observe the quality of their work. If they have none find another service.

(Information source: *Native Trees of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas, Landscape Uses and Identification*, Native Plant Project, P.O. Box 1433 Edinburg, TX 78540.)

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