

Plant Care Guidebook

Low Maintenance is NOT No Maintenance

At Scarff's we believe the care you give your new landscape plantings is just as important as the design and installation. Learning how to properly maintain your plants is the key to enjoying your landscape investment for years to come.

WATERING

Once your plants are installed, the watering becomes the owners' responsibility. We cannot stress how important watering is - especially during the first full growing season of your plants. It is very difficult to tell an owner or maintenance person how and when to water plants. The reason for this is that no two landscape situations are exactly alike. The best we can do therefore, is to give you some general guidelines to follow.

It is important to remember that a plant may be "killed with kindness" from over watering as easy as it may die due to lack of water. Check your plants each week from the first of March to the end of November. Water when the soil around the plant feels dry to the touch at a depth of 1 - 2 inches.

How To Water TREES and SHRUBS

After the initial installation, check your plants each week, water plants thoroughly if natural rainfall is insufficient. Apply water to individual plants by placing the hose at the base or trunk of the plant, allowing the water to run at a slow trickle long enough to saturate the entire root zone. If the water tends to run off, it may help to go to another plant and then come back in a few minutes to complete the watering. After the first year, established plants should be watered every 3 to 4 weeks - June thru September. Maintaining a 3" layer of organic mulch greatly reduces water loss to evaporation.

GROUNDCOVERS...English Ivy, Euonymus Coloratus, Vinca (Myrtle), Pachysandra, etc.

In order for these tender plants to spread and become established, they must be watered every other day for the first month, and then once every week thereafter for the next 2 months. If planted in late spring (after May 15th) or in the summer, watering may be necessary on a daily basis. A rotary sprinkler works best for large ground cover beds. Care must be taken when watering annual flowers, perennials and ground covers that are next to landscape shrubs. After the first year your ground cover should be watered every 2 weeks from June thru September. Mulch is also highly recommended.

SEEDED Lawns

Seeded lawns should be kept moist until a uniform stand of grass is established. Apply enough water to keep the soil moist, but not so much to cause run off.

Sod should be soaked daily the first week after installation. After the first week, sod should be watered every 2 - 3 days. If the sod shows signs of drying or turning brown, it should be soaked immediately.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS and EXCEPTIONS CONCERNING WATERING

To every set of rules or guidelines there are exceptions. The following list of special tips is included to help you adjust your watering methods to your specific soil type or plant types.

SOIL TYPE

The required frequency of watering will vary greatly according to soil types. Heavy clay soils tend to hold water and therefore need less water to sustain plants. **Remember that it is just as easy to kill a plant by over watering as it is under watering.** Use common sense! If a plant begins to show signs of weakening (yellowing of leaves or needles) and you know that it cannot possibly be due to lack of water, using your hand, dig into the soil around the ball and check to see if the root system is saturated with excess water. If it is, quit watering - your soil is not draining as fast as it should.

Frequency of watering also varies from season to season. Usually, watering is not as critical during the spring and fall as it is during the summer months (June - Sept.). Here again, use your own judgment. Make sure, however, to water plants close to buildings or beneath overhangs where they receive little or no rainfall.

PLANT TYPES

Some plants simply do not like wet conditions under any circumstances. Probably the easiest plants to kill by over watering are those in the evergreen family. The list includes all Taxus varieties (Yews), most pines, most Junipers, most Broadleaf Evergreens such as Rhododendrons, Azaleas, Boxwood, Holly Euonymus varieties, Oregon Grape Holly, and Pyracantha. A few others Bayberry, and most Flowering Ornamental Trees (especially Dogwoods). This is not to say that these plants necessarily prefer dry conditions, but they seem to be the severely affected by "water-logging".

Please do not forget about established trees and shrubs as they will also benefit from additional water, particularly during periods of dry weather. Avoid getting water on foliage during the heat of the day.

MULCHING

A good quality mulch is both decorative and functional. A mulch cover of 2 - 3" aids in weed control and eventually decomposes, supplying nutrients to the soil.

A mulch cover around plants serves to:

1. Conserve valuable soil moisture.
2. Prevent run-off, allowing more water to penetrate the soil.
3. Insulate the root zone to limit soil temperature fluctuation.

FERTILIZING

Trees, shrubs and ground covers can be fertilized in the spring (March thru April) and in the fall (Oct. thru Nov.) with a complete fertilizer. A complete fertilizer contains at least three major elements: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), and Potassium (K). Some fertilizers contain micro nutrients that can be deficient in some soils.

A good fertility program will promote vigorous, healthy plants on any landscape site. Plantings that are healthy and growing vigorously are less susceptible to an attack by insects and disease.

Each individual plant group within your overall landscape will have different nutrient requirements. These nutrient demands may be supplied to the plants through a wide array of fertilizer materials. You should start your fertilizing program after your plants have been growing for one year. Remember to always read and follow label directions.

Ericaceous (acid-loving) plants, such as Flowering Dogwood, Holly, Rhododendron, and others, perform best in organic matter and low soil pH (acid soils). Specialized fertilizers and soil amendments such as cottonseed meal and iron sulfate are beneficial when working with these ericaceous plants. These plants may also benefit from an additional application of fertilizer in June after they have bloomed.

WEED CONTROL AND PRUNING

WEED CONTROL

Weeds compete with desirable vegetation for light, nutrients and water. They are unsightly and can promote insect and disease problems. Weeds may be controlled by mulching, hand removal and by applying herbicides. Products such as magic gardener, Kleen-up and other products can help keep weed growth to a minimum.

PRUNING

Pruning is one the most essential landscape maintenance practices. When pruning is done properly, it will help maintain the plant forms that were intended. The best pruning practice is that which accomplishes the desired end without destroying the natural growth pattern of the plant. Following are some guidelines about why, when, and how to prune. We recommend Ortho's "All about Pruning" for more detailed information.

WHY

1. Pruning maintains a plant in a vigorous and healthy conditions.
2. Shrubs and trees often become unshapely unless restrained by pruning.
3. Because of the blooming and fruiting of many shrubs and trees, maximum displays of blooms or bountiful displays of fruit can only be obtained by pruning.

WHEN

1. Flowering Deciduous Trees and Shrubs should be pruned immediately after flowering. Top Of Page
2. Non Flowering Deciduous Trees and Shrubs ideally should be done during the dormant season. However, pruning may be done anytime the wood is not frozen.
3. Evergreens may be pruned just after the new growth is completed, usually in late spring or early summer.
4. Broadleaf Evergreens (Rhododendrons and Azaleas) need to have faded flowers pinched off (deadheading). Be careful not to pinch off next year's buds along with the faded flowers.
5. Whenever a stem or branch is dead or damaged.

HOW

The key to proper pruning is to have the proper tools and know how to use them. Some of the tools include: hand pruners, loppers, and pruning saws. Hedge shears, both electric and manual, are to be used for hedges only. Often trees, shrubs, and evergreens are sheared into squares, globes, cones, etc., causing the natural beauty of the parts of the plants to become shaded out and weakened, thus resulting in poor growth. Following are some general guidelines for pruning trees, shrubs, and evergreens:

1. Individual cuts should be made 1/4" above an outward facing, active bud at a 45 degree angle.
2. Branches should be cut at different lengths again, to enhance the plant's natural shape. Remember, avoid "haircut" pruning.

INSECT WEED AND DISEASE CONTROL

Pest and disease control is a specific science. The materials that control pests and diseases are constantly changing. Because we are concerned for your personal safety and best results, we suggest that you consult a professional Arborist for recommendations.

MAINTAINING ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Watering Ornamental Grasses to get them established is the same as for your newly planted trees and shrubs. The one difference being, if your grasses begin to look a little dried out simply cut them back and new growth should emerge. Once the plants are well rooted little or no supplemental watering is required, except in periods of drought, which sometimes occurs in this area.

Cutting back the foliage is the single most important maintenance rule for growing healthy, attractive grasses. Cut back the foliage at least once a year. Cut back ornamental grasses just before or just as the new season's growth begins to appear. It's best to cut back most grasses in late winter generally in our area early to mid March.

Most grasses should be cut back to within a few inches of the ground. Cutting back old foliage before the new growth emerges is easier than working around the new growth. Most grasses can be cut back very nicely with a pair of hand pruners. Be sure to sharpen the blade on your pruners, because the grasses will surely dull them quickly.

MAINTAINING PERENNIALS

Watering -Perennials, as with other new plantings is the same. Frequent checking of the soil and applying the water close to the soil, so as to avoid getting water on the foliage, is the best advice. Most perennials prefer good moisture with good drainage to the soil. With proper soil preparation, water your perennials 2 - 3 times a week. Once your perennials are established water only as weather conditions permit.

Mulching with bark, peat moss or other organic material will improve air / water relationship in the soil. Most perennials will perform better the following spring if an application of mulch has been applied in late autumn to protect against winter damage.

Trimming - Dead-heading (removal of dead flowers) and trimming off damaged parts during the growing season will maintain neat, clean, long blooming perennials.

Fall Clean up-When the top growth has died back, trim for neatness as desired. Dead top growth may either be removed or left as a protective mulch. Trim back to within a few inches of the ground. Clean out weeds and mulch over the plants to protect against winter damage. Fall is the best time to divide spring and summer flowering perennials. Otherwise, divide perennials in spring.



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