

Tree Staking and Watering

Have you ever noticed along the roadside a tree that has been surrounded by four, five, even six guy wires shooting off in all directions? If you have, you've experienced a pet peeve of mine: improper tree staking. As I get called out frequently to re-stake a tree that has gone four to five years with the original nursery stake, I am continually on a mission to find the best method to allow a tree to benefit from proper staking. The best answer I have found comes from a fellow Master Gardener and Arborist Russell Freeman. The following are his recommendations for a happy, healthy tree.

When staking all trees, they have to be able to move six inches in all directions. Wire inside of garden hose works well for a saddle. Now that the tree can move, it will have more force to pull out the stakes. Therefore, it is best to use two to three stakes (three is better) to prevent stakes from being pulled over. Once the tree has a chance to establish itself, remove the stakes. Fall is a good time to remove stakes on deciduous trees, as they do not have the added weight of leaves.

To promote root growth as the tree matures, drips to trees should be moved out and away from the trunk to the drip line of the tree. Ideally, wet spots from the drips should touch all the way around the tree and back to the area where old drips were removed. For normal watering, drips should be run long enough to soak the soil two feet below the surface. This can be checked with a probe. In summertime, watering a tree every 5-7 days is often enough. In the cooler months, most trees do fine being watered once a month.

Not mentioned above, yet important, is water duration, the length of time drips should be run to create those "wet spots." Typically, clocks on most all trees should be run for no less than 1 ½ hours. The frequency of watering changes however, depending on the time of year.

So there you have it; practical advice for supporting and maintaining our ever-valuable shade givers, and all without ever becoming the blight of the neighborhood.