

Tree Staking

Have you ever been traveling somewhere in Gold Canyon and noticed along side the road a tree that has been surrounded by four, five, even six stakes, guy wires shooting off in every direction, and the tree still appears to be minutes away from toppling over? If you have, you've experienced a pet peeve of mine; incorrect tree staking. As I get called out frequently to restake trees that have gone 4-5 years with the original nursery stakes, 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 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 your stakes. Therefore, it is best to use two or three stakes (three works better) to prevent stakes from being pulled over. Once the tree has had a chance to establish itself, remove the stakes. Fall is a good time for 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 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 the summertime, watering a tree every 7-10 days is often enough. In the winter months, most trees do fine with being watered once a month.”

Not mentioned above is water duration, which is the amount of time drips should be run to create those “wet spots” that Mr. Freeman mentions. This time of year (once all the rain stops), the duration should run from 1 to 1 ½ hours. Those of you leaving for the summer should set your clocks at a minimum of 1 hour for every seven days.

Now back to that poor sagging tree on the roadway. It got into that pickle by neglect to pull nursery stakes at planting and then given the proper staking as lined out above. Pulling nursery stakes after creating a 4-5 year dependency on them results in a prompt flopping over of the tree, which is why we see the 5-stake method being applied.

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

~ Tom