



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

SUPPORTING YOUR YOUNG TREE

By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I just bought a new tree. When I plant it, what should I do to provide support? What else should I do to take care of it?

A Staking and Tying:

- After planting your tree, remove the nursery stake, which is the thin pole tied to the tree.
- If the tree cannot stand upright by itself, support it by placing two stakes at least 18 inches from both sides of the trunk. Locate where the trunk bends, place one tie around the trunk, bring the tie back toward the stake and cross the tie to form a figure eight, and then secure the tie to the stake. Repeat on the other side at the same level.
- Cut off the stakes 2 inches above the ties to avoid damaging the tree.
- Check the ties monthly. Remove the stakes and ties as soon as the tree is able to stand upright on its own—usually within 6 months to a year. Staking too long slows tree growth.

You know it's important to keep a newly planted tree watered well. Here are a few more tips for caring for new trees, whether you plant them in spring or fall:

In most cases, staking is unnecessary for a newly planted tree, especially those with a trunk diameter of two inches or less. In fact, staking actually discourages the tree from forming a strong trunk. On a windy site, however, it may be necessary to anchor a new tree until its roots begin to penetrate the surrounding soil. Remove stakes one year after installation.

A bump from a lawn mower or the lash of a string trimmer can easily bruise the tender bark of a young tree, often causing a permanent scar, or even death. To provide some protection, enclose the trunk's base in a spiral plastic wrap-around collar made for this purpose. Then surround the young tree with a circle of mulch to eliminate the need to trim close to the tree's base. Don't pile the mulch against the tree trunk (a "mulch volcano"); leave a few inches bare to allow air circulation.

The wrap-around guard will also help keep mice and voles from gnawing the bark of the young tree. Where deer are common, drape the tree with plastic bird netting to prevent browsing. Remove the netting when the tree's branches are out of a deer's reach.

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