

# Landscape Plants: Fertilizing & Watering

## **Prevent runoff of water, pesticides, and fertilizer from your landscape plantings.**

Trees and shrubs require less fertilizer and less frequent irrigation than lawns. Too much water is the most common cause of decline in trees and shrubs in the landscape, either through directly killing plants or making them more susceptible to disease. Fertilizer runoff into storm drains pollutes creeks and streams. Maintain plant health and protect water quality by fertilizing and watering correctly.

## **Fertilize appropriately.**

- ◆ Many woody ornamentals such as nonflowering trees and shrubs do not require fertilizer, even at planting.
- ◆ Determine the actual cause of unhealthy looking plants before deciding to fertilize. Nutrient deficiency symptoms in most woody landscape plants are often due to unhealthy roots, poor soil conditions, or improper care.
- ◆ Fruit trees, vegetables, and flowering annual plants have variable fertilizer requirements. Follow plant care guidelines to avoid overapplication.
- ◆ If fertilizer is required, choose a slow-release type, such as organic fertilizers, that will feed the plant throughout the season.
- ◆ Fertilizer should be applied at the “drip line” of trees and shrubs and not directly on the trunk or crowns. The drip line is the area directly below the leaf canopy.
- ◆ Avoid overfertilizing. Too much fertilizer can result in plant damage, excessive plant growth, and additional water needs by the plant.

## **Water properly to promote plant health and avoid runoff.**

- ◆ Water plants during the cooler hours of the early morning rather than during the heat of the day or in windy weather.
- ◆ Use drip irrigation and soaker hoses to deliver water only where needed.
- ◆ Check soil moisture before watering.
- ◆ Use mulches on the soil surface to conserve moisture, control weeds, and maintain a uniform soil temperature.



- ◆ Discourage root and crown diseases by watering established trees and shrubs around their drip line, not around the trunk. See illustration below.
- ◆ Improper watering practices promote the development of certain root diseases.
- ◆ The specific amount and frequency of water needed varies greatly, depending in part on plant species, soil conditions, and the local environment.

## Irrigation scheduling.

- ◆ Newly planted trees and shrubs need more frequent watering for up to two growing seasons until they become well rooted. Once established, plants can be weaned to tolerate less frequent watering. Proper weaning develops deep roots and makes the plants better able to tolerate drought.
- ◆ Water established trees, shrubs, and groundcovers deeply but infrequently. In the absence of rain, most trees and shrubs benefit from a once-a-month thorough watering during the growing season.
- ◆ Normal lawn watering is not a substitute for the thorough watering required by deeper roots of trees and shrubs.



Water trees at their drip line. The drip line is the area directly below the outermost reaches of the branches.

### – PROTECT YOUR WATER –

To eliminate runoff to storm drains and protect our creeks, rivers and the ocean, minimize the use of pesticides and follow proper use and disposal practices. Whenever possible, use non-chemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products.



Learn more by contacting the **Sacramento UC Master Gardeners** at (916) 875-6913, Monday–Friday, 9 am to noon and 1–4 pm. For other pest information, visit the UC IPM web site at [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu).



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Learn more by contacting the **University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners Orange County Hotline:** (714) 708-1646 or [ucmastergardeners@yahoo.com](mailto:ucmastergardeners@yahoo.com). For other pest information visit the UCIPM web site [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu).



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