

We Need Trees and Trees Need Water!

PRESERVING CALIFORNIA'S URBAN TREES DURING DROUGHT



**Save Our Water
and Our Trees!**

During a drought, responsible water use includes watering urban trees.

Trees make our communities healthy, beautiful, and livable. Your trees provide an immense range of human, environmental, and economic benefits:

- Trees cool our streets and our homes, reducing energy costs and saving lives during heat waves.
- Trees help make our communities more climate resilient.
- Trees improve air and water quality.
- Trees provide shade to the landscape and reduce water needs.
- Trees slow stormwater runoff and help recharge groundwater.
- Trees add value to our homes & neighborhoods.
- Trees make our streets more inviting for walking and biking.

Trees and water are both precious resources. Without watering through dry seasons, we risk losing these benefits from our urban trees. It will take 10, 20 or even 50+ years to grow back mature trees.

TIPS FOR TREE CARE DURING DROUGHT

- For established trees (3+ years old), slowly soak the root zone out toward the drip line –the area under the farthest reaches of the branches– until water soaks 12-18 inches below the surface. **Do not water close to the trunk.**
- You can use a soaker hose, a sprinkler hose attachment on a low setting, or other systems. If you choose to use a drip system, monitor it to make sure it's functioning, add emitters in the tree's root zone, and increase the water.
- The roots of a young tree are located mostly near the trunk. Young trees need 5 gallons of water 2 - 4 times per week. Create a small watering basin with a berm of dirt. One method is to drill a small hole near the bottom of a 5-gallon bucket, place it near the tree, fill it with water, and allow it to slowly drain into the soil.
- Mulch, Mulch, MULCH! 4 - 6 inches of mulch or leaf litter improves vigor and helps retain moisture, reducing water needs and protecting your trees.
- Let the soil dry between waterings - trees need oxygen too!
- Avoid pruning or fertilizing trees during dry seasons. Lack of water and too much pruning both stress your trees. Fertilizer encourages leafy growth, which requires more water.
- Conserve water all the time: Shower with a bucket and use that water for your trees as long as it is free of non-biodegradable soaps.



ABOVE: A soaker hose placed in a spiral pattern toward the edge of the tree canopy. BELOW: Watering basin for young trees.

FAQ: TREES & DRY SEASONS IN CALIFORNIA

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I WATER MY MATURE DROUGHT-TOLERANT TREES?

Drought-tolerant trees, such as California oaks, need much less water than most others. Drought-tolerant trees may only need one or two deep waterings over the summer.

Trees that have never received regular irrigation may be harmed by adding extra water in the summer. Contact a certified arborist if you have questions about the health of your mature tree.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY TREE NEEDS WATER?

The amount of water your tree needs depends on your soil and tree type. You can check the soil moisture to see if it's time to water. The easiest way to check soil moisture is to take a long (8"+) screwdriver and poke it into the soil. It will pass easily into moist soil, but be difficult to push into dry soil. If you can't poke it in at least 6", it's time to water. This technique works best in clay and loam soils.

DON'T MY TREES GET WATER WHEN I WATER MY LAWN?

Your lawn sits on the surface of the ground and has shallow roots. It needs watering a few times a week, usually with a sprinkler system. Trees need to be watered less frequently, but with deeper soaking because their roots grow deep in the earth. Lawn irrigation does not water trees effectively. It generally reaches only the first few inches of soil, encouraging weak surface roots to grow.

CAN I OVERWATER MY TREE?

Yes. When trees are overwatered, the roots struggle to breathe because the excess water takes over the air pockets that they previously had. By slowly soaking water into the soil around the tree, the water will be able to penetrate down into the root zone. Then, after a deep water, let the soil dry out before the next big soak. The hotter the temperatures, the more frequent the deep waterings.

WHY NOT LET MY TREES DIE?

Dead or dying trees can be dangerous and pose great risks to your property and your loved ones. Removal of dead or dying trees can cost thousands of dollars. Replacing trees takes more money, time, and water than keeping established ones alive.

HOW DOES SUPPLEMENTAL WATERING HELP IN SUMMER?

Keeping trees alive helps keep your home cooler, meaning less energy and fewer resources spent on cooling systems and decreased water use in other areas. Deep watering of trees also helps replenish groundwater.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN WE HAVE RAINY WINTERS?

Recent weather trends indicate hotter temperatures in general and the likelihood of more extreme weather events – such as potential flooding. We need to take good care of our trees in hot weather with regular deep watering so they can withstand harsh weather.



ABOVE: Tree stressed due to lack of water.



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