

HOW TO GROW YOUR TREES ON

Young trees are dependent on us for their care - watering, weeding and feeding - to ensure good, strong growth. During their first years, they must be nurtured until they're strong enough to be planted into their final home.

HOW TO WATER YOUNG TREES

Watering can be one of the most time-consuming and badly executed activities in any tree nursery or garden. If you apply too much or too little, a tree can become stressed and die. But just the right amount, applied at the right time, will make your trees grow tall and strong.

Ideally, you should water your trees very early, before the heat of the day, or in the late afternoon. This ensures the sun won't evaporate most of the water before it gets to the trees' roots and helps avoid leaf scorch (when foliage turns brown, curls or shrivels due to drying winds or other unfavourable environmental conditions). Watering foliage late in the day can lead to fungi and mould developing on the leaves. Ideally, soil should be moistened to a depth of 5cm or deeper. Infrequent deep watering is better than frequent shallow watering.

Heavy clay soils will hold water much longer than sandy soils, but without regular watering, they can bake and cause root damage. Adding organic matter, such as compost, to your soil will improve its ability to retain water. Pots and root trainers also need watering and feeding more frequently than trees grown in the ground.

How to nourish your trees

Feeding trees ensures they have the right nutrients they need to grow. During the growing season, they may need feeding every month. Any yellowing leaves can be a sign of nutrient

deficiency, and indicate that more food is needed.

You can buy manufactured feeds, but it's best to make your own organic 'teas' from plants such as comfrey, borage, green alkanet, dandelion and nettle. The roots, stems, leaves and flowers of these plants contain vital nutrients that support plant growth such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, boron, copper, manganese, sulphur, iron and silicon. They are also better for the environment and cheaper to use, as they may already be growing nearby or you can grow them for this purpose. 🌱

HOW TO MAKE TREE 'TEA'

- 1 Cut comfrey, borage, green alkanet, dandelion or nettles into small pieces.
- 2 Soak the pieces in cold water for about four weeks, making sure they are submerged.
- 3 Dilute the resulting solution with water at a ratio of 1 part tea:10 parts water.
- 4 Use to feed and nourish your trees.



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Unless you have a very small area, an irrigation system is the most efficient way to water your trees. If you have power, set the system on a timer. There are many simple and cost-effective irrigation systems on the market, however, drip pipes are more effective than leaky pipes.



HOW TO MULCH

Mulching has lots of benefits and is essential for successful plant growth in any thriving Community Tree Nursery. Mulch is a thick layer of natural material you use to cover the soil around your young trees. It helps to suppress weeds and lock moisture into the soil, so you need to water them less often.

Some mulches also contain nutrients. They can help to improve soil structure when worms come to the surface then carry them deep into the soil.

Deciduous trees are naturally mulched by their own leaves in the autumn. This is a process that allows the natural cycling of nutrients back to the soil and is an essential part of a healthy ecosystem. In a tree nursery, fallen leaves should be left around trees wherever possible.

Collect leaves to apply as a direct mulch, or use

them to make leaf mould. Such mulches increase the nutrients available to mycorrhiza fungi, which in turn improve tree health by increasing the tree's access to soil nutrients.

Be aware of the risks of transferring any plant material between different sites, as trees may have developed relationships with mycorrhiza fungi. Introducing the wrong type may be ineffective at best or damaging at worse.

How to use grass clippings

If you're using fresh grass clippings as mulch, apply them in a thin layer (6mm deep) to allow them to start to break down before they begin to smell or rot. Thicker layers tend to remain too wet and can invite mould, which can be detrimental to plant health. They also get a bit smelly! 🌿



Above Mycorrhizae are beneficial fungi growing in association with plant roots. They take sugars from plants in exchange for moisture and nutrients.

Left Mulching is generally used to save water, suppress weeds and improve the soil around plants, but it can also reduce the amount of time spent on tasks such as watering and weeding.

THREE WAYS TO REDUCE WEEDS

Some people say there is no such thing as a 'weed' – there are just wild plants in places where you don't want them.

In any tree nursery, such species will always pop up, but don't worry. With good management,

most common nursery weed species can be easily tolerated or controlled.

Knowing what weed species are present in your nursery's soil and site perimeter will help you plan how to manage them.

NO DIG

Using no-dig methods when cultivating open ground beds will help reduce weed populations.

'No-dig' essentially involves mulching the soil with a thick layer of organic matter, notably homemade compost. Young trees are planted directly through the mulch, avoiding turning over the soil and exposing any weed seeds to light, which triggers germination in many species.

This technique can also reduce the amount of carbon released from the soil by limiting disturbance.

EDGING

Edging your planting beds to create a distinct gap between the cultivated area and any grass paths will help to prevent lawn weeds and grasses spreading into the bed. This is easily achieved by removing some turf and creating a drop of at least 5cm between the grass path and the bed. These borders should be regularly trimmed using edging shears and the clippings collected and composted.

Some people use timber edging. On sloping sites this can help prevent soil washing away, stop grass from encroaching and define the extent of the beds. It also allows you to mow and strim without risking damage to your new trees. However, timber edging can provide the perfect habitat and breeding ground for slugs and snails!

WILD AREAS

Allow room for wild plants to grow in designated areas. This will encourage beneficial insects to feed and breed here, which can form part of a nature-based, pest-management plan for your nursery.

Time the removal of any flowering weeds to prevent more seeds from being set. Docks, for example, are a valuable plant for many insect species, but if these are present in your wildlife areas consider removing the flowers before they set seed.

Avoid using chemicals for weed control for both environmental and cost reasons. In most situations, they are not necessary and can have negative long-term effects on the wider environment and human and animal health. 🌿

