



Tree Care & Maintenance

Recommended best practices for caring for newly planted and established trees.



Caring for Trees

Like children, your trees need and deserve loving care.

While hiring professionals is an option, most tree care is best done by you, the homeowner or renter.

Below are some of the basics for taking care of your trees. ReLeaf Petaluma's Tree Stewards will be happy to help with your tree care and maintenance questions: releafpetaluma@gmail.com.

For additional details and for assistance, check out [San Francisco Friends of the Urban Forest](#), [Sacramento Tree Foundation](#) and the [California Native Plant Society](#) websites.



Soil, Mulch, and Nutrition

- ✓✓ Fertilizer is generally not necessary.
- ✓✓ Adding some compost to the soil removed when planting is extremely beneficial to assist with new root development and drainage.
- ✓✓ Avoid using gravel and rock as mulch.
- ✓✓ Maintaining 3" layer of organic mulch covering a wide area around the tree helps retain moisture, discourages weeds and just looks nice!
- ✓✓ Keep mulch 6" or so away from the trunk of the tree to keep it dry.

① For more information on soil, mulch and nutrition please visit [Friends of the Urban Forest](http://www.friendsoftheurbanforest.org).



Petaluma is situated in a historically alluvial (river) plain and thus the soil profiles tend toward the clay/ clay-loam end of the spectrum. Heavier soils such as clay (e.g. adobe) are very high in nutrients but often drain poorly.

Watering

- ✓✓ Soil should be moist but not wet.
- ✓✓ 10-15 gallons of water per week is usually enough - monitor the soil's moisture at the start to determine the proper amount and frequency.
- ✓✓ Water native trees deeply once per month, not with sprinklers. Extend watering using a drip line when possible.
- ✓✓ Heed the Drought: Capture the water that runs from your shower head until it's warm: you will save enough to water your trees!

① For more information on watering, please visit [Friends of the Urban Forest](#).



Watering your newly-planted tree is one of the most essential activities to get it off to a good, healthy start. An established tree is an excellent way to ultimately conserve water that would otherwise be lost through runoff or evaporation.

Stakes, Ties and Fencing

You want your tree to move gently with the breeze to encourage trunk strength and flexibility while remaining protected.

- ✓✓ Remove the nursery stake tied directly to the tree trunk
- ✓✓ Place stake(s) 1'-2' away from the trunk with one of the stakes providing support from the prevailing wind direction.
- ✓✓ Loosely secure the tie: Securely to the stake, and gently wrapped around the trunk.
- ✓✓ Use soft material for the ties (ideally soft web fabric rope, or rubber / soft plastic) and avoid the use of wire, rope or hard plastic.
- ✓✓ Remove stakes & ties after 2-3 years or when the tree can stand upright on its own.

❶ For more information on stakes, ties and fencing, please visit [Friends of the Urban Forest](http://www.friendsoftheurbanforest.org).

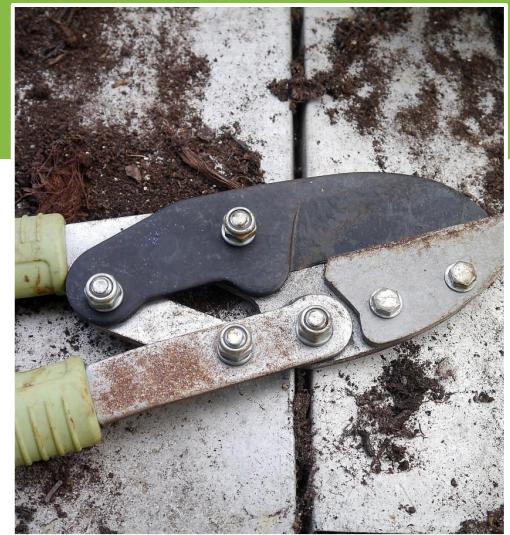


Tree-staking and tying is one of the most misunderstood aspects of young tree care.

General Pruning

- ✓✓ First pruning should be in the winter of the 2nd year
- ✓✓ Use sharp & sterile pruners when working on your tree.
- ✓✓ Remove dead, damaged or diseased twigs/branches and suckers.
- ✓✓ Remove branches that are rubbing against each other, aesthetically unbalanced or exceedingly eccentric.
- ✓✓ Native trees tend to have a looser shape; don't overprune and never "top" (cut back the leader branches).
- ✓✓ Do not remove > 25% of the live canopy in one year.

① For more information on pruning, ask a Releaf Petaluma Tree Steward or visit [Sacramento Tree Foundation](https://www.sacramento-tree-foundation.org/) or [Friends of the Urban Forest](https://www.friends-of-the-urban-forest.org/)

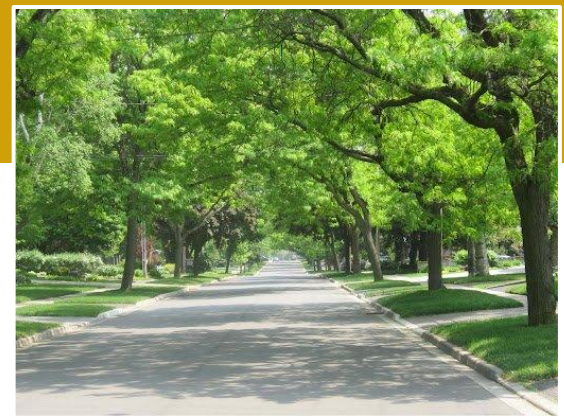


When looking to prune your new tree, follow the “THREE D’S” rule for removal: Dead, Diseased & Deranged. Please reference the additional pruning resources before starting your job.

Street Tree Care & Maintenance

- ✓✓ Tree basins should be kept weed-free and mulched to retain moisture and provide aesthetic appeal.
- ✓✓ Tree basins using bricks or decorative rock should be loose - facilitating water to pass through and good oxygen exchange.
- ✓✓ Material should be kept away from the tree's trunk in all cases.
- ✓✓ Sidewalk damage occurs when trees are planted too high or the species has particularly aggressive roots. Proper species selection and initial slow, deep watering are essential components to getting those roots down into the ground.
- ✓✓ Root guards can be used during planting if there are concerns about a tree's potential for sidewalk damage.

① For more information on street tree care, please visit [Friends of the Urban Forest](https://www.friendsoftheurbanforest.org).



The most common issues with street trees are branch height to allow passage of pedestrians and vehicles, tree basin maintenance and sidewalk damage. The initial planting height of a tree will determine its overall future health.

Street Tree Pruning

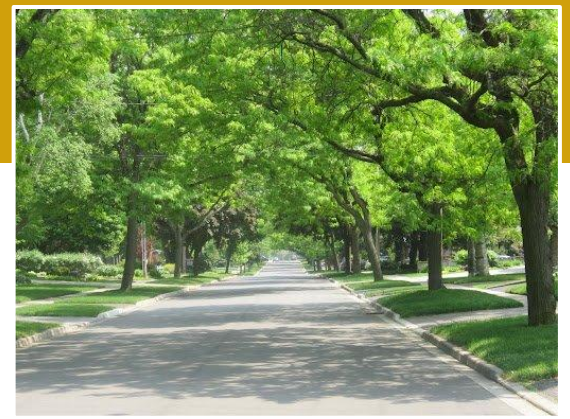
✓✓ Branching on the sidewalk side should start at 8' off the ground and streetside should be at 10'-12' off the ground.

✓✓ Shorten (rather than remove) young twiggy branches along the bottom parts of the tree trunk

✓✓ Gradually remove limbs that are too low over its first several years until you're ultimately where you want to be.

✓✓ When it's time to remove a branch to raise the height for the tree's ultimate first branches, make a clean cut with a sharp pruning saw just outside the branch collar to promote healing of the wound.

① For more information on pruning, please visit [Friends of the Urban Forest](http://www.friendsoftheurbanforest.org).



For street trees, you ultimately want branching to occur to accommodate pedestrians on the sidewalk and vehicles on the street. Young twiggy branches along the bottom parts of the tree trunk provide strength and nutrients to the developing tree when young.

Protecting Trees from Damage

Gophers, deer, dogs and humans are often the source of a young tree's woes.

- ✓✓ Protect young trees from frequent dog urination
- ✓✓ Use Gopher cages, netting and physical barriers (including plantings) to deter most damage from animals and humans.
- ✓✓ Avoid burying the top of the gopher cage.
- ✓✓ To protect street trees from car doors and foot traffic, use the three-stake system - with two stakes streetside, one on the sidewalk side.



The correct tree species planted in the appropriate location rarely has pest or disease issues. More commonly, trees suffer from environmental or cultural problems which may or may not be correctable.

Planting Trees Too Deep or Shallow

Planting a tree too shallow can lead to excessive drying out of the tree's roots as well as making them susceptible to damage. If possible, soil can be mounded around the tree's exposed roots to correct this situation. This is especially true in sidewalk tree basins.

A tree that is planted too deep is unfortunately quite difficult to remedy, and can literally drown due to lack of oxygen. If it's very recently planted, it can be carefully replanted taking care to maintain the rootball intact and repositioned at the proper height. Careful watering will be essential.



The initial planting height of a tree will determine its overall future health.

Where to Buy Your Plants

- Go to ReLeaf Petaluma's Planting Palette and click on any of the recommended plants to go to Calscape.org and find mapping of nurseries in our area that usually carry that plant.
- Some of the recommended plants may be found at local Petaluma nurseries and garden centers such as Harmony Farm and Friedmans. There is wider availability at Urban Tree Farm and Cal Flora near Santa Rosa.
- Call ahead for availability. For help siting or funding your tree or shrub, contact us via email at releafpetaluma@gmail.com
- To donate to ReLeafPetaluma to fund trees for others, go to our web site <https://www.releafpetaluma.org/take-action>