

Tree Talk

Over the course of every season, I receive a lot of questions on various aspects of tree care. I thought I'd clear up some common misconceptions that people have often heard over the years.

Watering trees and plants has been a regular occurrence for many people this year with the drought conditions we have been experiencing. When watering trees, unless the tree was planted in the last two years, you need to focus putting the water down from the tips of the branches (dripline) and outward. Many just lay the hose by the trunk which does not benefit the majority of the tree's roots unless the tree was just planted. Tree roots can spread outward 1-2 times the height of the tree. It is also recommended to keep watering until the ground freezes. Trees need ample soil moisture to prepare themselves for winter.

When should I fertilize my trees? I normally don't recommend fertilizing trees unless you have had your soils tested and know there is a nutrient deficiency. If you know you have poor soils, which do occur around here, especially in newer residential neighborhoods, then I recommend using a granular grass or tree fertilizer after the first hard frost. Follow the labels recommended rates. Fertilizing now can spur unwanted growth that will not harden off by winter.

Using a pruning sealer or paint after making a pruning cut is no longer recommended unless you are making a pruning cut on an elm tree during the growing season. By sealing the cut on an actively growing elm, you are masking some of the 'scent' that attracts the fungal carrying insects that causes Dutch Elm disease.

There are many other misconceptions, but the last one for now pertains to planting a tree in the same location where one was just removed. As long as you grind enough of the old stump out, you can easily plant a tree in the exact same location. There are a couple rare exceptions, but I have yet to tell someone not to plant in the same spot if conditions are right.

Please contact me for additional information or questions at aaron.kiesz@aberdeen.sd.us or 626-7015

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