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Should I Water the Tree?

Yes you should! But read on for the best ways to help out the trees and save water.

Trees are important for many reasons: they cool us with their shade, clean our air, and provide food for animals and people alike. Yards and landscapes are where most water is used—and in times of drought the best places to conserve and capture precious water. Trees are often left thirsty. They can take a long time to show their pain so many people don't realize their tree is dying until it's too late.

Here are some tips for keeping trees healthy while wisely using water:

Water Wise

Always check the soil before watering plants. For trees, dig down a few inches. If the soil is wet or cool, do not water.

How much water a tree needs depends on the type and size. These are some general tips:

Young trees usually need water about once a week. Water slowly and deeply. Make a ring of soil around the tree about two feet from the trunk to hold water like a bowl, and fill and refill this ring with buckets of water or a slow-flowing hose with a timer. Try to give them enough water to soak down about 18 inches into the soil.

Mature trees usually need more infrequent deep, slow soaks. In dry periods trees could need water about once a month. Use a soaker hose with a timer all around at least under the tree canopy. Try to run enough for the water to soak at least 18 inches down into the soil: most tree roots are only in the top 3 feet of the soil.

Right Plant in the Right Place

Removing water-thirsty lawn and planting climate appropriate plants is a great way to save water! Save your landscape water for established trees. When planting new trees, consider trees that are native to your area that do not need a lot of water.

Catch the Rain

Many of us do not know we can shape the yard to catch water. Digging shallow basins and mounding up soil like bowls in your yard can catch a whole lot more water than you might expect. A small 1" storm can add up to hundreds of gallons on an average roof. Avoid digging under established trees—you do not want to dig up roots and hurt trees—but make basins to catch water nearby or anytime you plant new trees and plants.

Catching stormwater off your roof in cisterns is a great idea, or using a bucket to catch water in the shower are also great ways to collect water for your thirsty trees.

Mulch

Chopped up wood and leaves are great for thriving soil and saving water. Plants and trees that grow in mulch are healthier, and mulch keeps the soil moist and cool longer so you don't need to water as often. The leaves and wood that drop under plants make the best mulch, especially for trees like native oaks.