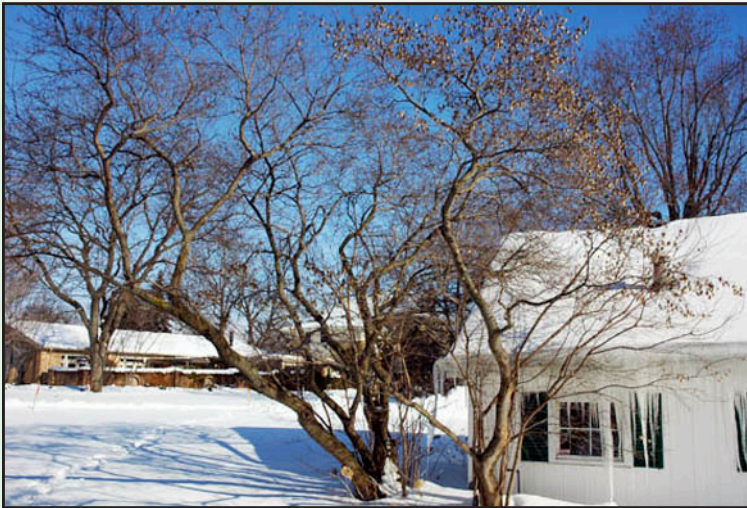


# Before Winter

## LARGE CALIPER TREE CARE

**L**arge trees whether they are evergreen or deciduous are a substantial investment in the future, they are the landmarks by which we measure the progress of the garden and our lives and make a significant impact in the development of our new landscape. Next to hard landscaping such as patios, pools and garden structures trees are an expensive investment, both in terms of the difficulty in establishment and dollars spent.

For the first few years diligence is required because the roots of newly planted trees will take time to penetrate into the surrounding soil and begin to support the tree outside of its root ball. Although the tree may appear mature when purchased it is essentially in its infancy until it is fully rooted into the native soil. Success with newly planted trees can be ensured by following a few simple steps.



### **Watering:**

Watering is critical, however, over watering can be as serious a problem as under watering. All trees benefit from a deep gradual soaking as opposed to frequent shallow watering. Deep watering will force tree roots to develop at the lower soil depths ensuring a stronger, healthier tree able to withstand periods of drought. Deep watering cannot be ensured through conventional in ground sprinkler systems but requires the use of a garden hose. Place the hose at the base of the candidate tree and open the tap 1/8-1/4 turn ensuring a gradual slow trickle. Placing the end of the hose on a board, brick or stone will prevent erosion of the root ball. The hose may be left in place for several hours or even days, depending on the flow of water and soil type.

A simple test to determine water penetration depth is easy to perform. Simply dig into firm soil or surrounding turf with a garden spade and see if the soil at the bottom edge of the spade is moist. If it is, soil moisture should be sufficient. Once you have performed this test several times you will have gained the experience to determine the time required for water to seep to the appropriate depths for your local soil type.

### **Evergreens:**

Evergreens require special attention prior to ground freeze-up. These plants should be supercharged, in other words all tissue in the plant should be full of moisture to its limits. This is important since on sunny winter days moisture will be lost through the evergreen leaves. A deficit is created since the soil moisture is frozen and cannot be replaced by the dormant roots of the plant. If the trees are super-charged the moisture lost in most cases will be inconsequential and the tree will come through the winter unscathed.

### **Mulch:**

Mulch should be replenished if necessary to help retain soil moisture and to equalize root zone temperatures. Mulch should be about 4-5cm deep but should not come into direct contact with the bark. The outside of the mulch ring should be several centimeters higher than the level portion, essentially forming a saucer to assist in water retention from irrigating.

### **Support:**

Stakes and ties should be checked periodically over the winter months for signs of rubbing and chaffing. Irritation to the stems of newly planted trees can put undue stress on the plant system and delay or slow desirable growth.

### **Rodent Control:**

In areas of long turf a tree guard to protect against rodent damage is recommended. It is important that the guards extended well above the expected snow levels as rabbits have a surprising reach gnawing on their winter treats.

Occasionally newly planted trees may experience some winter die back, this is not uncommon and if it does not affect the overall character of the tree, it can be pruned away once all tree growth has flushed out in the spring.

Both newly planted trees and mature trees can experience damage over the winter, the most common problem is drought stress caused by drying winter winds on evergreens. The second most common and often devastating for the tree is rodent damage. Rabbits have a voracious appetite for young apple trees in particular and care should be taken to protect them diligently.

After two seasons of growth, the staking can be removed and you can become lazy with watering and after care, applying irrigation only in periods of prolonged drought. In a few years hopefully a hammock can be strung between your charges and then you can truly begin to appreciate your success.

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