

## **Do I Need to Water my Trees in Winter?**

### **Part Two of a Two Part Topic**

In part one, we discussed the reasons trees need to have sufficient watering in the winter, so how much and how often should they be watered? Trees are living things and like all living things they should not be allowed to become dehydrated. Dehydration will have damaging effects whether we are talking about a tree, a pet or a human.

If we have a pet that we take care of, we consistently make water available so the pet can drink the water as it needs it. We should use the same concept when determining how much water a plant needs. With a pet we check its water bowl to make sure that water is available. With a tree we check the soil to see if there is water available. This is not difficult to do, but it does require a small amount of effort and commitment to your trees.

The simplest way to check to see if there is enough water is to use a screw driver or similar tool. Use the tool to dig down at least two inches deep and check for moisture. The soil should be damp or moist. If it is dry you need to provide water if it is wet it is too much water and needs to dry out. Too much water on a regular basis will damage a tree as quickly as too little water, so remember the soil should be damp, not soaking wet (*roots must have oxygen and water to be healthy and function properly, if the soil is soaking wet there is not enough oxygen and the roots cannot function properly*).

Water your trees before the soil becomes completely dry, but when you water it is best to water thoroughly and then don't water again until the soil needs it. In the winter the soil should receive a good soaking about every 20 to 30 days. If we do not receive a good supply of natural moisture for about 20 days check the soil moisture and water your trees if needed. During the summer you may need to water every 5 to 10 days to prevent the soil from becoming too dry. As you get in the habit of checking the moisture level in the soil you will become more aware of the moisture needs and more easily time the watering for the time of year.

If you have a sprinkler system it is probably turned off in the winter, but it is not difficult to water with a hose. If the area around the tree is fairly flat then simply lay the hose down and turn it on lightly and let it puddle in an area for a while and move it around the tree as needed. If the terrain around the tree will cause the water to run off, get a small sprinkler head to disperse the water rather than just laying the hose down.

Some people like to use a watering tool that is inserted into the soil and injects the water directly into the soil. These work well especially on trees planted on an incline where run off is a problem, however this tool must be used correctly for it to be effective and it will require you to be more involved in the watering than just laying a hose down. Do not insert the tool more than 4 inches deep in the soil (*the roots that need the water are in the first 8 inches of soil, so don't go too deep*). Water should be injected into the soil for a few seconds not minutes in each hole you make. Each injection should be spaced about 18 to 24 inches apart underneath the entire canopy of the tree.

The outer edge of the branches is called the drip line. Roots will extend past the drip line in most trees; however the largest concentration of roots by far is underneath the canopy of the tree. My suggestion is to be sure you do a good job of watering where the largest concentration of roots are found and then water beyond that area if you are able and have time. There are two ways of generally determining the approximate location of the largest concentration of roots, which is where you should start watering.

The first way is to start about half way between the trunk and the drip line. The second way is to measure out from the trunk about 3 times the diameter of the trunk, so if the trunk is 10 inches in diameter the largest concentration of roots is approximately 30 inches from the trunk give or take 6 inches. Research has shown this is the more accurate way to determine the location of the largest concentration of roots, but remember trees are living things and can vary. Soil conditions also have an influence on root growth and placement. But this is a useful guideline to get us watering in the right general area. After properly watering this area, if you are able extend your watering out farther toward the drip line and closer to the trunk do so.

Having wood chip mulch around your trees is very useful and highly recommended. There are many reasons why wood chips should be place around your tree under the canopy and I will cover them in another article, but one reason is to help hold moisture in the soil and slow down run off.