

Give your trees the best start

Weeding

Grass and weeds compete for water and nutrients in the rooting zone of young trees so, if at all possible, maintain a 1 metre diameter circle clear of grass and weeds.

Weeding is easier if the circle is kept topped up with wood chip mulch. Keep mulch clear of the tree trunk in order to allow the bark to breathe.

Wear leather gloves when hand weeding in case of sharp litter.

Strimmer protection

A tree's conducting tissues are just beneath the bark and are easily severed by strimmer damage. It is a major cause of death or decline in trees of all ages, but especially young trees.

A weed-free circle will ensure that strimmers need not come near the tree and it is the ideal solution if it can be maintained by local volunteers.

If grass is allowed to grow up to the tree, strimmer guards should be fitted and checked regularly. They will need to be replaced as quickly as possible if missing or damaged.

Watering

Young trees will almost certainly need to be watered during their first and second summers in the ground. The aim should be to keep the soil soft and moist in and around the root zone.

Watering should start when the leaves open and continue until late summer. A bucketful of water every 3 to 4 days is a rough guide depending on weather conditions.

Watering should be done slowly so that it percolates through the soil rather than running off the surface. It can help to spike the ground just outside the nursery rootball with a garden fork.

Tree ties

Tree ties are needed to keep the tree upright until it is established with its roots holding it firm in the ground. This can be determined by pulling the tree gently and seeing if the rootball moves.

Once the rootball is firm, the tree ties should be completely removed and the stakes should also be removed.

Until a tree becomes established, the tree ties should be kept tight but not to the extent that they bite into the bark. It may be necessary to loosen ties slightly in the second or third year after planting as the tree increases in girth.

Pruning

Formative pruning will probably be needed as the tree starts to establish. This requires some specialist knowledge and experienced tree wardens will be pleased to advise.

Finally

Stay safe! Before doing practical jobs, assess the risks for yourself and anybody nearby. Take precautions.

Work with others if possible and wear a hi-viz vest.

Ask if you are unsure or need tools or materials.