



RUSTIC ROAD

LANDSCAPING

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Maintenance: Keeping Your Landscape Healthy

Your recently purchased landscape plantings are one of the few purchases you can make that will appreciate in value over the years. Of course, there some care and effort required to keep things growing, healthy and looking good. The following is a collection of tips on general maintenance. Please keep in mind that the following is only a brief summary of the voluminous information printed on the subject. Use this as a general guideline and call us if you have specific questions or concerns. If we don't have an answer for your specific question, we'll be happy to make one up.

NEW PLANTINGS

Watering: Your new plants have had most of their roots removed and are out of proportion with their crowns (leaves). For this reason they need extra water to survive. They were watered daily at our nursery and may still require as much as this in very dry weather. **Monitor all new plants daily during the first month.** Usually, a good soaking every 2 or 3 days is sufficient for the first few weeks. How much is a good soaking? Watering frequencies can begin to lessen to once or twice a week after the first critical two weeks. Monitor weekly after that for the next year.

Tips:

- We prefer to see whole areas watered with sprinklers vs. the trickle method at the base of single plants. This allows plants more time to absorb the necessary water.
- Wind, sun, sloped sites, sandy or gravel conditions can increase the need for water.
- Shade, clouds, rain, cool nights or heavy clay soils can decrease the need for water.
- Use common sense. If a plant looks wilted or dry, even though it was recently watered, water immediately! Conversely, if the area is still damp from the last watering or recent rains, hold off watering until things dry out.
- Plants fail most often from 1) root rotting caused by over- watering in heavy, clay soils (20%) or 2) lack of adequate moisture in lighter, sandy soils (80%).
- When in doubt, move the mulch away from the base of the plant and check the soil 1-2" deep with your finger (as you would with your houseplants).

Stakes: We have found stakes to be a necessary evil in establishing large

shrubs, lawn trees and evergreens in exposed areas. The stakes should remain in place for approximately 18 months. In some cases, especially with top-heavy grafted specimens, the stakes may need to stay in place 24 to 30 months.

Fertilization: (Of trees, shrubs, perennials and ground cover)

Proper nutrition is essential for healthy plant growth and establishment. We recommend fertilizing the year **following** planting and every 1-2 years thereafter. In general a balanced formula with mild nutrients is best. Purchase a quality material from a quality supplier such as the Burlington Garden Center and always follow all label instructions.

Insects & Disease: I hate these subjects. They are the bane of our industry and rapidly getting worse! Don't ever, ever call me about them. "Scott, he no lives here no more." Actually, bugs & cruds are just like everything else that we've discussed. You need to correctly identify the problem and use an appropriate solution. I've found the best two specialists in these areas are: 1) U.W. Plant Pathology / U.W. Extension website at <http://www.plantpath.wisc.edu/> and 2) For our local customers, Sir Walter Uebele of the Burlington Garden Center also stands tall among bugs. His phone is 763-2153. If Walt can't cure it you don't have it.

Tips:

- Send a sample of the insect or infected leaves in a sealed zip-lock bag to U.W. Plant Pathology. All information is found on their website at <http://www.plantpath.wisc.edu/pddc/>
- The most common mistake we see made by homeowners, is treating an insect problem with a fungicide or a disease problem with an herbicide, etc. Identifying the problem correctly is the most important step.

Bark Mulch: Shredded bark mulch is the most common type of mulch we use. It is a good choice for a number of reasons: it retains enough moisture but still allows the soil to breathe; it's easy to apply, looks natural, etc. There are some items to keep in mind.

1. Bark mulch is used without a weed barrier fabric beneath it. Therefore weed control is critical. The bark will inhibit some weed growth (10 - 20%) but most of the control comes from the pre-emergent chemicals or constant hand weeding.
2. Depth of bark mulch is critical as well: use too little and not enough moisture is retained and weeds flourish or use too much and the tree or shrub gets root rot and dies. The following is a general guide:
 - a) Groundcover & perennial beds - ½ to 1" depth maximum
 - b) Shrub beds & foundation areas - 2 to 2 ½" depth maximum
 - c) Lawn trees & wind break evergreens - 3"

When applying fresh bark, frequently check the depth.

Weed Control: Total weed control is a two-step approach. *Pre-emergent* control involves treating the soil/planting beds with a chemical, which prohibits the germination of seeds - **before they sprout**. This chemical has no adverse effects on already green and growing plants, be they weed or not. Preen, Snapshot, Treflan and Chip-co are brand name pre-emergent herbicides. Read and follow label instructions for application. Typically these are used twice annually (April 1 & August 1 approximately).

When weeds have sprouted they need to be treated with a *post-emergent* herbicide. These types of herbicides work through contact with plant leaves. Generally, these products will kill or injure whatever plants they come in contact with, so it is critical that they are applied carefully and according to their instructions. Kleen-up, Round-up and Finale are some readily available products to use once weeds are growing.

Tips:

- Apply pre-emergent herbicide per label directions annually in March or April for spring germinating weeds and again in July or early August for fall germinating weeds.
- Top dressing with shredded bark mulch after pre-emergent applications tends to increase its effectiveness.
- String trim or clip heavily weeded areas prior to post-emergent herbicide spraying. This will use less chemical and aid in clean up.
- Maintain a 1-3” mulch layer in planting beds to help eliminate most weeds as well as aid in pulling those weeds who show themselves.
- There is no such thing as 100% effective weed control. The key is to keep up with it before it becomes a major problem.
- Weeding is like a good marriage. It takes a little effort every day to maintain the highest level of satisfaction.

Pruning: For basics you need to prune out the 3-D’s: Dead, Diseased and Damaged branches and twigs. Next is pruning for shape or size, which is more subjective. Most new plants have been properly pruned at the time of planting. The first required pruning is typically the following fall or spring. Pruning is as much an art as a science and therefore it is probably best to consult a trained professional to keep your growing investment in tiptop shape. Another good source for pruning techniques is your county horticultural agent. In Racine, Kenosha and Walworth counties the phone number is 262-886-8460. There are a number of excellent state publications available.

Certain plants can be damaged or killed by improper pruning. Service Berry, Birch & Pagoda Dogwood are plants that refuse to be sheared or topped. When in doubt feel free to call. I’m here for you.