



How to Water Trees

A BRIEF GUIDE TO PROTECTING TREES THROUGH RESPONSIBLE WATER USE

Trees in climates like Santa Barbara’s should be watered occasionally even in years when we’re getting enough rain—but during times of low rainfall, they need our help more than ever.

Tips for Tree Watering

WATER AT THE BEST TIME OF DAY

Water in the evening or very early morning. This allows water to soak into the soil before the daytime sun speeds evaporation.

USE MULCH TO KEEP WATER IN THE SOIL

Adding a layer of mulch insulates and feeds the tree’s roots. Make the layer 4–6 inches thick, and extend it out as far as the tree’s drip line—but keep it 2 inches away from the trunk to prevent rot.

ACCOUNT FOR AGE/SPECIES

Trees of different ages and species have varying watering needs. See the box below for more information.

USE SOAKER HOSES/DRIP

Soaker hoses and inline drip tubing systems are much more effective for watering trees. Lawn sprinklers don’t water deep enough.

WATER WHERE IT COUNTS

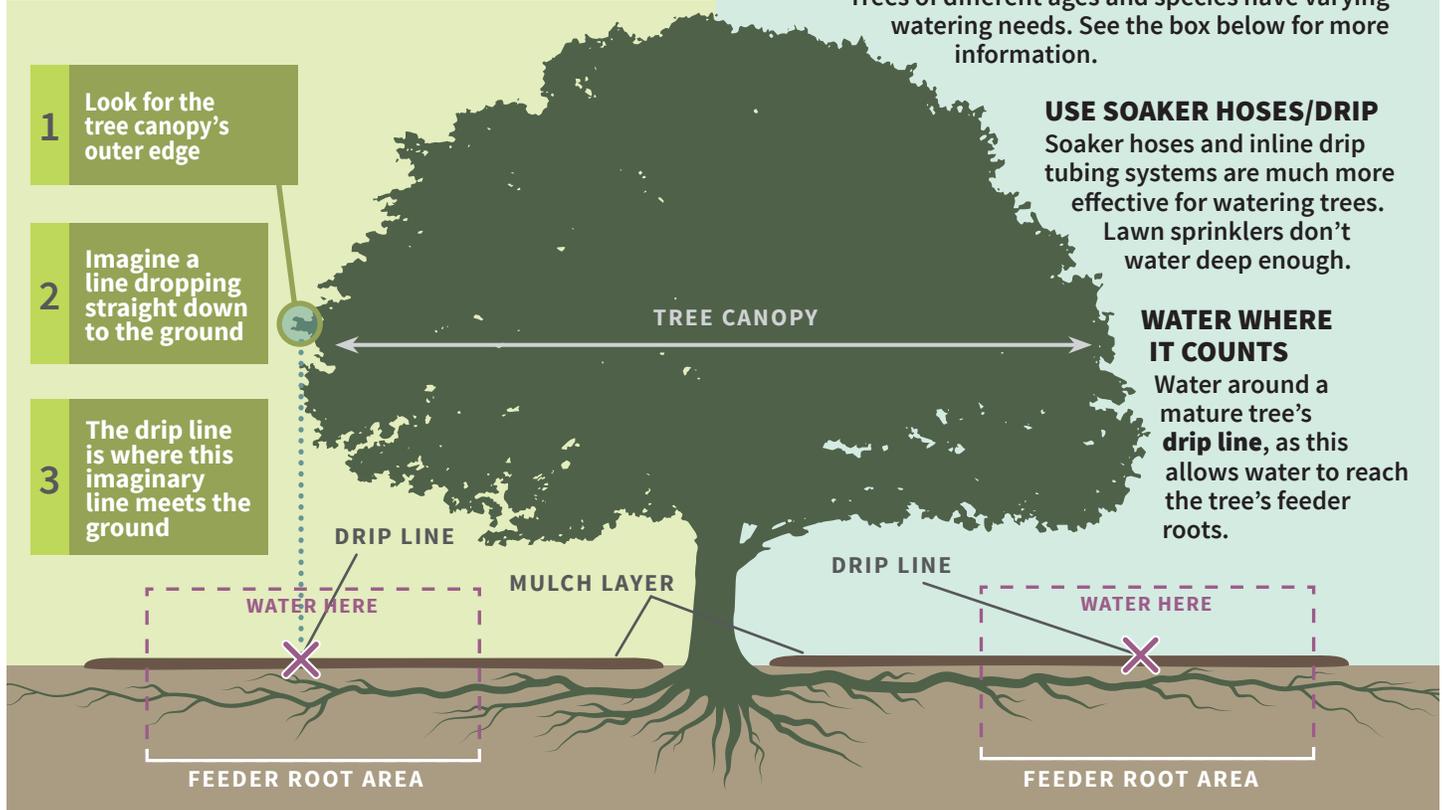
Water around a mature tree’s **drip line**, as this allows water to reach the tree’s feeder roots.

How to find a tree’s drip line

1 Look for the tree canopy’s outer edge

2 Imagine a line dropping straight down to the ground

3 The drip line is where this imaginary line meets the ground



A tree’s age makes a difference!

MATURE TREES

1. Water once a month.
2. Water enough to soak the ground to 18 inches deep.
3. Use a pressure regulated soaker hose or drip tubing with a timer to water. See SantaBarbaraCA.gov/TreeWatering for more information.

YOUNG TREES (UP TO 3 YEARS)

1. Water once a week.
2. Use about 15–20 gallons each time you water.
3. Make a basin with a 3–5 inch ring-shaped mound in the ground around the tree; use a hose to fill the basin slowly.

How can you tell if a tree is water-stressed?

SIGNS OF STRESS IN TREES

Trees can show stress or ill health for many reasons. If you think a tree may be suffering due to underwatering, you may want to consult a tree care professional.

Leaves may show symptoms

Drought-stressed trees may have leaves that appear wilted, curled, or yellowed.

Trees with needles may begin to brown at the tips, or may turn yellow, red, or purple.

Palm trees, which can suffer from both having too much water and too little water, may also start to show browning fronds. Fronds may wither, droop, or fold at the middle.



Fruit or seeds may change

Fruit trees suffering from too little water may have smaller fruit than usual. Fruit may also appear scorched.

Drought-stressed trees can also produce much greater amounts of fruit or seed, as they make an effort to help their species survive.

Is the soil around a tree too dry?

...or too wet? When the soil is at optimal moisture levels, trees absorb water and nutrients more easily. Use this trick to help you determine your soil's moisture level.



Dig down 6–8 inches into an area of soil in the tree's ideal watering zone. Pick up a handful of soil and try to squeeze it into a ball in your palm.

TOO DRY

The soil in your hand crumbles apart and won't stick together.

TOO WET

The soil in your hand squelches or smears like a paste.

OPTIMAL

The soil in your hand clumps together nicely.

Why is saving trees so important?

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Trees improve air quality

Trees can filter pollutants out of the air by absorbing them into their leaves.

Trees save water

Trees slow down evaporation from the surrounding landscape. Tree root systems also help prevent soil erosion.

Trees help us save energy

Homes and buildings with trees around them are shaded from the sun, reducing the energy required for air conditioning in hot weather.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Trees improve human health

Studies show that spending time in areas with trees can reduce stress, improve cardiac health, and promote positive mental wellbeing.

Trees improve property values

A home's value can be raised up to 15% by tree-filled surroundings.

Trees can encourage safer driving

When trees are planted along the sides of roadways, their presence can cause motorists to slow down significantly.

Further resources

For more information and resources, please visit SantaBarbaraCA.gov/TreeWatering

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