

A property owner's guide to new plant care



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What does it mean for a plant to become 'established?'

A tree or shrub is 'established' when its root system grows to be the same size as its above-ground counterpart (the trunk and canopy). This takes about one to two years for most plants. You can expect most plants to follow the "sleep, creep, leap" rule. During the first year, plants focus on root growth. In the second year, roots are still becoming established and some above-ground growth occurs. During the third year, established roots are able to support more significant leaf and branch growth.

One of my trees looks sick. What should I do?

PSE representatives will coordinate with property owners that received plants to review plant health about one year after installation. It is not uncommon for newly installed plants to exhibit some transplanting stress, especially in the summer following installation. Regular watering, weeding and mulching will help. Please contact us with further questions and concerns about your specific trees and shrubs.

For more information

Please visit our website at pse.com/vegetation to find phone numbers for local arborists and a contact form for questions.

The following resources outline industry plant care guidelines:



City of Kirkland

kirklandwa.gov/files/sharedassets/public/public-works/surface-water/tree-care-and-maintenance.pdf



Pacific Northwest ISA

pnwisa.org/page/treecare



Trees for Seattle Program

seattle.gov/trees/planting-and-care/young-tree-care



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PSE has planted new trees and shrubs on your property. Now what? It takes about one to two years for newly planted shrubs and trees to establish. Root systems grow much wider than the above ground part of the plant, so it is vital that young plants receive consistent watering for establishment. This guide addresses some of the frequently asked questions about plant care for property owners.



How do I care for newly planted trees and shrubs?

Mulching



Mulch retains water, prevents the growth of weeds, and insulates soil. Add two to four inches of mulch in a ring around the base of plants. Avoid letting the mulch touch tree trunks.

Staking



Most young trees don't need to be staked. Trunk movement signals the tree to grow, and stakes can hinder this process. If your new tree is staked, make sure the trunk is not constricted and has room for some movement. Remove stakes after about one year or when the root ball seems secure.

Fertilizing



Avoid applying fertilizer for at least one year after planting. Many fertilizers promote leaf and stem growth, so the addition of fertilizer to young trees and shrubs is often harmful because plants direct much of their energy to root growth within the first year.

Watering



Water is vital for newly planted shrubs and trees, especially during the first two years of growth. A good rule of thumb is to apply one to two gallons of water for every inch of your plant's trunk or stem diameter (so a tree with a two inch trunk would need two to four gallons of water). Watering should occur at least once per week. More frequent watering may be needed depending on weather conditions. Focus on watering between June and October.

Pruning



Do not prune your tree or shrub within the first year. Allow it to first overcome the stress of being relocated and planted.

Weeding



Remove plants within two feet of your tree's trunk or shrub's stem. Plants growing this close to your tree/shrub compete for the same nutrients.