

Top 10 Ways to Kill a Tree with Kindness

1. Wrong plant

The best way to develop a low maintenance, healthy landscape is to match plant requirements to site conditions. Choose plants that do well under the conditions you have. Many landscape problems are caused by environmental conditions that stress plants and make them more susceptible to injury. Consider disease- and insect-resistant cultivars when choosing new plants.

2. Planting too deep or too high

More newly planted trees die from excess water caused by poorly drained soil than any other single cause. Most new suburban development sites are unfit for plant growth, and trees are often planted in highly compacted, poorly drained soil. To combat this problem, plant trees so the top of the root ball is one to two inches higher than the surrounding grade. The root ball will settle a little, so the higher planting will help keep the roots from sitting in a pool of water. On the other hand, planting the tree with the root ball too high is not good either. Many trees are planted with more than half of the root ball above the surrounding grade. This habit necessitates staking, which has its own negative impact on the trees long term strength. It's best to allow the tree to grow to withstand the prevailing winds, but staking prevents this from happening. A tree planted in late fall or winter when the tree is dormant has less wind load and more time to develop anchoring roots before leafing out in the spring.



Undesirable: A mulch volcano places excessive mulch above the flare of the trunk and will lead to damage and likely kill the young tree in time.



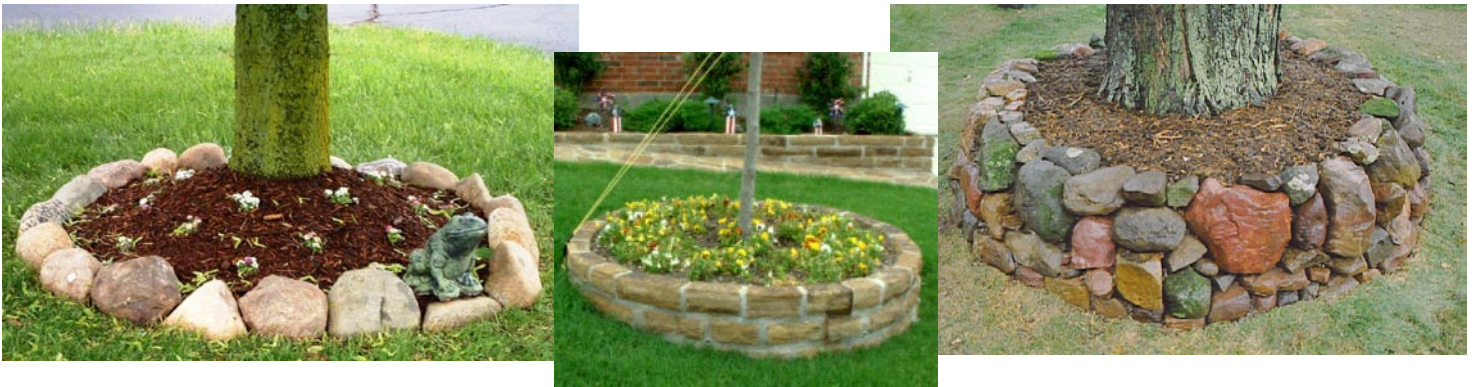
Mixed Results: In contrast to the excessive mulch applied on the tree in the background, the mulch is more appropriately applied to the tree in the foreground. Approximately two inches of mulch is applied and it is not in direct contact with the trunk.

3. Excessive mulch, soil & edging

Applying a layer of mulch is a great way to conserve moisture and reduce annual weed seed germination. One to two inches of mulch is plenty. Many people use a much thicker layer of mulch in an effort to stop perennial weed growth. But tough perennial weeds can grow right through the mulch. Mulch that is too thick prevents moisture from reaching the tree

roots. The correct method is to form a circular ridge of soil at the edge of the root zone and then lightly mulch this saucer so that the soil and mulch together trap rainwater and feed it to the roots.

Mulch should not touch the trunk. Soil and edging tree rings should not be added to existing trees. Extending a wall or ring to a height above the grade surrounding the tree is problematic, especially when soil and mulch are added above the flare of the first root at the bottom of the trunk. Soil applied to the critical root zone reduces necessary aeration. And when mulch or soil is applied too deeply, it piles up against the trunks of trees and causes decay, thus providing an entry for insects and disease organisms. In addition, roots tend to grow into deep mulch and are less protected from drought and cold stress when those conditions occur. Before applying fresh mulch, remove the crusty surface layer that hardwood mulch can form after even a single growing season. Save tree rings for newly planted where the tree can be planted at the proper grade.



In various shapes, materials and sizes, tree rings are not good for the health of a tree when the grade is raised above the flare of the trunk of the tree, no matter how tidy they look or how many landscapers or neighbors are installing them.

4. Drowning in water

Newly planted trees and shrubs are often killed by kindness. Check to see if the soil is dry before adding water. Remember that wilting can be a symptom of too much water, as well as too little water. If the plant is standing in water, the roots will begin to rot. When the roots are no longer capable of taking up water, the plant wilts. Only water an inch once per week for the first year or two, and then only when there has been less than an inch of rain.

5. Dying for a drink

On the other hand, don't ignore thirsty plants. And that goes for all your trees and shrubs, not just the ones you planted last weekend. It takes about one year per inch of caliper (trunk diameter) for a tree to become established in a new landscape. Check the soil to see whether your plants should be watered. When you water landscape plants, soak the soil slowly with a soaker hose or a regular hose turned down to a trickle.

6. Cutting too soon

Plants need leaves to make food that is used to grow new roots-the key to quick establishment. Removing leaves at planting reduces a plant's ability to make food. So leave the pruning shears in the tool shed at planting time. However, by a tree's second growing season it is generally safe to prune. Pruning trees when they are young corrects their shape. Remove crossing branches, branches that rub against each other, branches that are growing back into the center of the tree or

branches that disrupt the natural shape of the tree. Early shaping will result in healthy trees that need very little pruning later in life.

7. Cutting too much

Never cut main branches back to stubs. Unfortunately, the topping process is often self-defeating. Ugly, bushy, weakly attached limbs usually grow back higher than the original branches. Proper pruning can remove excessive growth without the problems topping creates. In addition, many arborists say that topping is the worst thing you can do for the health of a tree. It starves the tree by drastically reducing its food-making ability and makes the tree more susceptible to insects and disease.



Topping trees hurts. Proper pruning is important to maintain the tree in good health.

This is true for Crape Myrtles too. Although the practice of heavy pruning of Crape Myrtles is common, it is not appropriate. You may prune the tips immediately behind the seed pods, but even this is not necessary.

8. The cutting edge



This tree shows mechanical damage from a string trimmer. The wounds offer entry to pests and diseases.

The number-one health problem of established trees is "moweritis" or "weed-whacker disease." Many insects and disease organisms take advantage of a wound to enter a tree. When you damage the base of the tree with the lawn mower or string trimmer, you provide that entry wound. Use a thin layer of mulch around the base of trees up to approximately six inches from the trunk to ensure that your mower doesn't get too close.

9. Overspray of herbicides

Desirable plants may be injured by spray drift, over-application or misapplication of herbicides. Be sure to read labels and use care around ornamentals. Many

chemicals become more volatile during hot weather. Read the labels and don't use pesticides if the temperature is above that recommended for application.

10. Picking up on pests

Before you can treat the problem, you must identify the cause. Insects and disease organisms have complicated life cycles. Sometimes a pest is only treatable during one stage in its life cycle. First identify the pest and understand its life cycle before you treat the problem.

Learn more from Links

The Arbor Day Foundation <http://www.arborday.org/trees/index.cfm>

Trees are Good <http://www.treesaregood.com>