

Caring For a New Tree Planting

North Dakota Forest Service

Weed Control

Controlling weeds in your tree planting is essential. Seedlings are very susceptible to competition from weeds which slow tree growth and kill young trees.

- **Mechanical weed control** means using a tiller, cultivator, or disk to disturb the soil and destroy competing weeds. During mechanical weed control, care should be taken to go no deeper than three inches. Cultivation deeper than three inches can damage the roots of the tree. Mechanical weed control should be performed several times a year (depending on weed growth.) Weed control should continue for at least three years after planting, or until the trees are well established.
- **Chemical weed control** means using herbicides to reduce competing vegetation. Chemicals can be incorporated into the soil or applied directly to the leaves of the weeds. Herbicides must be labeled for use on the tree species in your planting. Always read and follow all label directions.
- **Cover crops** of slow growing grass or a thinly seeded annual crop reduces competition from aggressive weeds. Cover crops can be seeded before or after the trees are planted.
- **Weed barrier fabric** is a synthetic material that is laid over the tree planting and the seedlings are pulled through a hole in the barrier. In addition to weed control, weed barrier fabric conserves soil moisture. The material should be checked annually to make sure the edges are secure and the fabric is not rubbing against the tree. **As the tree grows, the hole in the fabric will need to be enlarged or it will girdle and kill the tree.**

Irrigation

- Watering immediately after planting is one of the most beneficial things you can do for your newly planted trees. Watering saturates and moves small soil particles creating good root to soil contact. This contact with the soil is essential if the tree roots are to take moisture and nutrients to survive.
- If possible, water trees once every ten days during periods of dry weather the first one to three years after planting.

Fertilizer

- Fertilizer and other soil amendments are not recommended for newly planted trees, as most soils have adequate nutrients or tree growth. Fertilizer will stimulate top growth at a time when the tree needs to grow roots and adapt to its new location. Fertilizers will also increase the tree's need for moisture.

Replants

- Just hold on! Young trees can take a long time to leaf out their first year, often much later than mature trees of the same species. Some species (Rocky Mountain juniper, for example) can turn entirely brown within the first month after planting. Don't rush to replace young trees right away—they may be putting their energy into establishing a solid root structure. However, individual tree seedlings can die for any number of reasons and losing several adjacent trees can reduce the effectiveness of your tree planting. Wait until late summer or early fall to determine your true replant needs, and plant the replacements in the spring.

Caring For a New Tree Planting, cont.

Actions to Avoid Around New Tree Plantings

- **Herbicide Drift:** Seedlings are particularly sensitive to herbicides and their small size can put them directly in the path of accidental spray damage. When applying herbicides around tree plantings, care should be taken to avoid herbicide drift and the use of granular herbicide products can be a good option.
- **Mechanical Damage:** Protect your tree planting from accidental damage from farm equipment. It is not unheard of for small trees to be accidentally tilled under or mowed off by unknowing equipment operators. Use stakes, flags or posts to identify the perimeter of your tree planting.

Keep in mind...

- North Dakota's climate and physiography are at the edge of what many tree species will tolerate. Hang in there! Your efforts to establish a new tree planting show that you have a long-term commitment to conservation.
- No amount of TLC can completely make up for unsuitable planting sites or inappropriate species selections.

Bottom Line— New tree plantings require extra care to get them off to a good start—but the results are worth it!

Tree Planting Site Preparation

- Sod-covered Sites: Till to kill the sod and keep maintained for ONE growing season prior to planting
- Cropland sites: Till immediately prior to removing sprouted annual weeds and grasses as needed
- No weeds present= no need to till!

GOOD Site Prep



- To minimize compaction, avoid tilling soils that are wet
- Be alert to potential wind and water erosion during the fallow period
- Consider seeding an annual cover crop (like oats or spring grains)
- Avoid deep tillage (greater than 2in deep) immediately prior to planting to prevent drying the seed bed

BAD Site Prep

