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THE DIGGIN' DUTCHMAN

VERMEER TREE EQUIPMENT DIVISION



ARBORIST SHOP TALK

By Hank Harvey Jr.
Rutledge, Pennsylvania

Tree Feeding

Every year thousands of trees die of malnutrition! Yet tree fertilization continues to be one of the most neglected facets of the arboriculture industry, even though it is certainly one of the most important considerations of tree care in general. And, to the commercial tree service contractor, tree feeding has got to be one of the most lucrative operations of his business. The labor required to do the jobs does not have to be skilled, and the margin of profit is great.

When you get right down to it, there is nothing you can do for your customers' trees that is more beneficial overall than feeding them. Any living thing is better able to resist disease and withstand injury when it is in vigorous condition. A tree's natural resistance can often ward off mild disease infections and enable it to recover from insects, storm damage, and/or drought if it is in a healthy condition. Most of your customers don't realize this, so it is up to you, the professional, so inform him. It is for his own benefit as well as yours.

There are several different methods of tree feeding employed by professional arborists. Probably the most well known and most popular method is the dry-fertilizer-in-the-ground technique. This method requires only a bag of tree fertilizer (usually a 10-6-4 mixture), a funnel and a punch bar or earth auger to make the 12" to 24" deep holes or "cores" in the ground. They are made in concentric rings around the tree trunk (no closer to the tree than three to four ft.) and usually not further out than the drip line of the branches. The holes

are filled to about 2" from the top to prevent "burning" the grass roots.

Another popular way to feed trees is the liquid-forced-into-the-ground under pressure method. This can be done by means of just a garden hose and a Ross-Root Feeder type of feeding needle that can be purchased with its own nutrient cartridges. However, many professionals prefer to use a more sophisticated, higher pressure system which uses a pressure spraying unit. They mix their own soluble fertilizer and inject it into the soil at about 250 psi pressure. The higher pressure is faster than low pressure and forces the liquid into a wider saturation area initially. It also gives the commercial operator an additional use for his power sprayer.

There are other methods of tree fertilization now being used. One is systemic injection (Mauget) via injector cups and feeder tubes in the tree, and the up and coming pressurized injection method. The cup type injection system employs small cups forced into an injector stem which is driven into the tree. The cups are then pushed onto the stem and the chemical concentrate allowed to stay there for several hours or more until liquid has been "taken up" by the tree.

The "plug" type cartridges (Medicaps) are put into small holes drilled into the trunk of the tree. They are used primarily for treating specific nutritional deficiencies rather than for general tree fertilization. They are being used extensively right now for treatment of iron deficiency chlorosis.

The pressure injection technique is a method also used primarily to treat specific ailments at the present, but it may become more popular in the future if environmentalists resist the foliar tree spraying enough to force commercial arborists to go another route. The main advantages of the pressure injection system are its ability to force large dosages of nutrients (or whatever is being injected) into the tree rapidly, and the fact that there is no chemical residue left behind.

Foliar fertilization enables the trees' leaves to utilize the nutrients supplied almost immediately. It is ideal for a tree that needs fast invigoration. Of course, the effects are not nearly as long lasting as those obtained by root feeding or even trunk injections.