

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

By Roger Funk, Ph.D., Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio

Q: My supervisor and I have a difference of opinions as to fertilizing newly planted trees. In the past I have fertilized, while planting with 10-6-4 or 10-6-4 Fe. As our department is seriously understaffed, I feel it would be more beneficial to fertilize during the planting process than to put it off indefinitely. What is your opinion?

A: We have considerable research and field experience that demonstrates the benefits of fertilizer applied to newly planted trees. However, plants are more sensitive to overfertilization during the establishment period because of their limited root systems.

Traditional fertilizers used in the tree care industry are soluble and apt to injure some roots that contact the fertilizer granules or are close enough to the granule that the soil solution is saturated with nutrient salts as the granule dissolves. With most trees that are established, this loss of a few actively absorbing roots is more than compensated for by the stimulation of new roots. A newly transplanted tree, however, has already lost a significant amount of active roots. Additional root losses

through overfertilization may seriously injure or even kill the plant.

The use of slow-release fertilizers or a reduction in the recommended amount of soluble fertilizers will reduce the risk of overfertilization while at the same time stimulating new growth and reducing the time required for establishment. I suspect that the reluctance of some people to fertilize newly transplanted trees is the result of their experience with overfertilization.

Q: Besides conventional deep-root feeding and pruning, what can be done for oaks suffering from soil compaction due to construction?

A: Periodically test the moisture in the root zone and water whenever necessary or, if applicable, install drains.

Construction can cause a disruption in the natural flow of ground water, particularly with the installation of foundations and with grade changes, which may cause the root systems of existing trees to be subjected to unaccustomed levels of soil moisture as water is diverted either toward or away

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