

New trees: to stake or not to stake



NANCY STAIRS
Technical Editor

The tree is in the ground, are you going to stake it? Staking a tree for support is a common practice. Nearly as common is injury to trees as a direct result of staking. Incorrectly installed supports, and/or failure to remove supports can result in the girdling of young trees by compressing the cambium and killing the tree, or weakening it (not just weakened tree health but weakened tree structure as well).

In some instances, small trees appear to be staked in order to keep them from escaping.

Triple guy wires tightened to a significant degree of tension will indeed keep a tree from moving, however, the majority of small trees do not require any staking let alone to the extent of tightened guy wires.

The questions to ask when considering the need for staking trees are:

Does the tree need to be staked? In some cases

the answer will be yes. Large trees with a heavier crown and a small root ball, trees in wet or sandy soils, small trees which cannot stand alone and trees in windy areas or where the possibility for excessive tree movement is high are all candidates for staking. It is important for the trees to establish roots into the surrounding soil and excessive movement will impair that. Tree stability is a valid reason for staking.

Will the manpower and time required for stake removal be scheduled in a timely manner? More often than not, the answer is no. Most supports can and should be removed after one growing season. If this commitment cannot be met, the supports will very likely remain on the tree until the tree is wounded by the stakes or girdled by the ties. Follow-up is essential when staking is used.

Are suitable materials available for staking? Repeat after me: "Wire inside an old garden hose is NOT suitable tie material." If you don't think you can remember that, write it out 100 times.



Method and follow-up problems: A triple staked tree allows for no trunk movement and failure to remove wires has wounded and weakened the tree, affecting present tree health and future tree strength.

This common tie material is inflexible, as wire tends to be. Anything used for a tie should have a flat, smooth surface and be flexible and non-abrading, to allow the tree to move. Trunk movement actually helps to strengthen the tree trunk and increase trunk taper.

If you are going to use stakes make sure that the stakes are placed in undisturbed soil and outside the root ball, before the backfill is added, to avoid damaging any large roots. The stakes should be positioned so that the tree will not be blown into the stakes by the prevailing wind. A single stake can be located on the side of the prevailing wind so that the tree is blown away from the stake. Double stakes should be positioned perpendicular to the prevailing wind. Don't forget to remove the stakes and ties after the first growing season. And definitely don't remove the ties and leave the stakes.

Tree planting is an investment of time and money, but to see the payoff, pay attention to post-planting care. **LM**

Agree/Disagree? Comments/Questions? Column Suggestions? Let Nancy Stairs know at 440/891-2623. Fax: 440/891-2675. E-Mail: nstairs@advanstar.com.