



CHICAGO
REGION
TREES
INITIATIVE

Our Trees.
Our Communities.
Our Future.

HELP TREES THRIVE

The Chicago Region Trees Initiative urges you to care for trees where you live. Here's how:

- **Trees need water.** Check the soil a few inches down. Is it dry? Pour three to four five-gallon buckets of water slowly near the tree or use a slow trickle from the hose for 15 minutes.
- **Mulch helps trees.** Spread mulch as far out as the branches reach, approximately three inches deep. Do not pile mulch or soil against the tree trunk.



The Chicago Region Trees Initiative is a coalition of institutions, municipalities, and tree industry professionals actively improving the urban forest in the seven counties around Chicago.

Learn the best ways to care for trees at chicagorti.org/trecare.
Trees need people's help. Thanks for doing your part.

This card is provided to you by our local partners and the Chicago Region Trees Initiative.

MULCHING

A layer of mulch over its roots helps any tree grow and thrive. It is especially important for newly planted trees, but mulch is good for established trees, too. For more information, see mortonarb.org/plantadvice.

A young tree that is mulched may grow twice as fast because it is better able to develop roots.

Mulch helps keep tree roots cool in the summer and holds moisture in the soil. It keeps lawn mowers and string trimmers safely away so they do not damage the tree's bark. Mulch also deters weeds and improves the soil as it breaks down.

Mulch should be made of plant material that will decompose over time.

The best material is chipped or shredded wood, although leaves and grass clippings can be used. Compost also makes a fine mulch. Do not use gravel or stone.

Spread mulch in a wide saucer shape around the tree's trunk.

Mulching imitates the way trees grow in nature. In the wild, the forest floor is covered with a layer of twigs, decomposing leaves, branches, and other dead plant matter.

In urban areas, trees do not have this natural mulch layer and often have to compete with turfgrass for nutrients and water. Replacing grass with mulch protects trees and helps them grow.

Maintaining a mulch layer over a tree's root zone is one of the most important and effective ways to help trees live long, healthy lives.

The right way to mulch

- Spread as wide as possible
- 3 to 4 inches deep
- Saucer shape
- Keep clear of tree's bark



Spread mulch 3 to 4 inches deep in a wide circle around the tree trunk. Ideally, mulch should cover the whole area under the tree's branches. For newly planted trees, make the circle at least 4 to 6 feet across.

Form the mulch into a low saucer shape a little higher at the outer edge. This will contain rainwater so it can soak down to tree roots.

Make sure the mulch does not touch the tree's bark.

If there is a lawn under the tree, spread mulch right on top of it rather than digging out the grass. The grass beneath the mulch will die, which is better for the tree.

Avoid these mistakes

- Don't mound mulch against trunk
- Don't let mulch touch bark
- Don't use synthetic materials, gravel, or stone



Never pile mulch against the trunk of a tree. It can trap moisture and cause the bark to rot, making the tree vulnerable to disease and insect problems.

Synthetic materials, gravel, and stone are not good insulators and do not break down to improve the soil.

Most tree roots are just below the soil surface. Typically, 90 percent are no deeper than 18 inches.