

Norway Yard Trees; Complete Version, First in a Series of Articles

Planting and Caring for Newly-Planted Trees

Planting new trees in a yard or boulevard can be greatly assisted by deep digging your hole to about half again the required depth to put the tree at its original depth. In the extra deep hole, fill it to the required depth of the root ball with rotted compost or peat moss. Then dig down and mix the compost with the surrounding soil, maintaining enough depth to put the roots below the soil surface and the tree trunk above the surface. This provides a nutrient and water bank for the tree.

If the tree is planted with the tree spade and provided by the City, there may be a little plastic bag that fits around the base. If soil is dry, it is reluctant to accept water as well as it would if the soil were moist. The bag allows water to slowly percolate into the soil so that water will not run off. The bag also helps to keep the soil moist under it so that the water added to the bag will all be used by the tree. If one waters the tree, it is best to provide enough that it penetrates to the deepest roots. If watered with lesser amounts, the tree's surface roots will be more developed, but the deep roots will be less developed. The deep roots are most important for the tree's development for the first few years, until these deep roots are able to find natural moisture.

If you are really into growing the tree and are willing to put some sweat equity into it, I have found over the years that tilling green grass clippings into the soil, with a shovel or tiller, provides good water percolation, nitrogen, and the buffering nutrient bank. My apple trees and black walnuts averaged two feet of height growth per year, starting in their second year. The first year is usually a time for the tree to start establishing roots; it does not do much in the way of aboveground growth. I tilled the clippings in a circle just outside of the root ball for two or three years successively, starting immediately after the tree was planted. The trees that I planted without the clippings grew much more slowly. It appears that if a tree gets a jumpstart in the first two or three years, then the tree will keep growing at the accelerated rate after the third year when I leave it on its own. I have walnut trees that are about sixteen years old, and are five to six inches in diameter and over thirty feet tall. Several of my apple trees started bearing the second and third year after I planted them.

If you till in clippings, I would recommend one garbage bag in the spring, then another bag about the first of July. Too much nitrogen can keep the tree from going dormant in the fall.

I was concerned about limiting the tree's roots by tilling around it, but it seemed to encourage the deeper rooting; my trees flourished. I stayed about two feet out from the stem of the tree and tilled about two feet wide outside of that. If you are doing that with one of the City's transplants, stay about six inches wider than the original planting hole. I experimented with grass clippings applied only on the surface, and it did not do as well. Tilling the clippings in mixes the grass and the soil so it makes a sponge. The clippings on only the surface tend to actually shed surface water such as rain, but they do make a water-retaining mulch for the water that does get through, and the nitrogen does leach into the soil, demonstrated by the rapid growth of dark green grass adjacent to the clippings.

I fertilize my trees with nitrogen after the second year, only in the spring, but that is risky; it is possible that the nitrogen will be over-applied, or that the trees do not get enough water. Nitrogen, if applied too heavily, will kill a tree or can hurt it badly, but when I spread about a quarter of a cup around my balsams in the spring they grow crazy fast. I also mulch, which is a great buffer and slow release agent. Good luck this spring.

~Otto Jacob