

NATIVE OAK TREE CARE

Guidelines for Keeping Your Trees Healthy

IRRIGATION

Native oaks require little or no supplemental irrigation and generally remain healthiest in non-irrigated soils. Oaks are naturally adapted to California's dry summer conditions, which they prefer.

MULCHING

An optimum treatment below the tree canopy is to place a 4-inch layer of chipped bark mulch over the soil surface. The ideal, and least expensive, chipped bark contains a wide range of particle sizes from sawdust up to 2-3 inch pieces. Less effective, and more expensive, bark mulches have been screened for a uniform site, may come from chipped recycled lumber, or are made from shredded redwood bark, and these are not generally recommended. Do not place more than 4- inches and do not place it immediately against the trunk.

LANDSCAPING

If landscaping beneath your oaks is desired it must be kept to a minimum to prevent a negative impact on tree health. Avoid extensive landscaping, especially turf, herbaceous groundcovers, and annuals or perennial flowers which require heavy irrigation. Select instead plants that tolerate shade and dry soil conditions. Many beautiful native plant species, as well as species from other Mediterranean parts of the world, will thrive under these conditions. Do not plant or irrigate within 10 feet of the trunk under any circumstances. Between 10-feet and the edge of the canopy dripline use plants as accents rather than groundcovers. Drip-irrigate only to get new plants established, and then only periodically through the warmest summer months. An ideal establishment scenario includes installing plants in the late fall and allowing root systems to establish over the winter months. During the first growing season use the drip irrigation system to minimally irrigate, possible threes time per month or less. In subsequent years a monthly irrigation, or less, during the hottest months will keep plants healthy, attractive and vigorous if they have been carefully selected.

Paving and soil compaction over the root system can be extremely damaging and may cause distress and decline. Decks are an excellent way to create usable outdoor space beneath native trees.

FERTILIZATION

Native oaks seldom require fertilization, especially if they have been mulched. If foliage is mottled, or lacks a deep green coloration, light fertilization with nitrogen fertilizer may be beneficial. Soil testing by a local soil-testing laboratory is the best way to determine soil fertility.

PRUNING

Pruning is not generally necessary on native oaks except to correct structural problems or to remove dead wood. Removal of more than 10% of live foliage at any one time can be harmful to the tree. Avoid pruning in the spring and fall. Have oaks pruned by a qualified and certified arborist to maintain their health and structural integrity.

SIGNS OF PROBLEMS

Any of the following symptoms may be indicators of a serious problem.
If you observe any of the following symptoms contact a reputable arborist to determine a course of action:



- Thin or open canopy; sparse foliage; foliage drop
- Mottled, yellow, or small foliage
- Dead or dying branches or foliage
- Dense, short shoots on branches and/or trunk
- Decay or cavities in the trunk or large limbs
- Fungal conks, shelf mushrooms on the trunk or root collar
- Wet, oozing, or slimy patches on the trunk or limbs

Successful landscaping can be developed around mature native trees by understanding the basics of tree care. Implementing the guidelines contained in this handout will help keep your valuable native trees healthy and happy.

For additional information contact the Town of Windsor Planning Department at (707) 838-1021.

Reference Materials:



Acorn to Oak – A Guide to Planting and Establishing Native Oaks. Lisa Bush and Rock Thompson. Published by Circuit Rider Productions, Inc.

City of Palo Alto Urban Forestry Program – http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/trees

California Oak Foundation – 909 12th St, Suite 125, Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 448-9495

Circuit Rider Productions, Inc – 9619 Old Redwood Hwy, Windsor CA 95492
(707)-838-6641

Text Prepared for the Town of Windsor by: John C. Meserve, Certified Arborist
Horticultural Associates