

# How to Kill a Tree



*This is an attention-getting title for an issue of the bulletin that uses reverse psychology to explain proper tree care.*



from the **TREE CITY USA®  
BULLETIN**

## City Life Is Tough for Trees

Instead of the respect they deserve for hundreds of benefits freely provided, trees are too often treated like yesterday's newspaper.

At best, well-meaning homeowners forget that a tree is a fragile system of living tissue. The life of a tree is so tenuous that naturalist Enos Mills marveled that any can even survive. Existence depends wholly on paper-thin leaves, a sheath of microscopic cambium cells protected only by the wooden armor of bark, and a mat of roots absorbing the chemicals of life — or death — within inches of the soil's surface.

Little wonder that trees in the center of cities live an average of only seven years. Chances for survival increase with the distance from the center of town, but even so, American Forests reports that the average for all urban trees is only 32 years of life. This is a far cry from the 150 years or more that the same trees could be expected to live in their native habitat.

The reasons for early mortality are many and most are avoidable. This bulletin covers some common examples.

## When Trees Are Young ...



### TO KILL A TREE



- Let trees and the surrounding soil dry out.



- Stake them tightly, leave wires until the tree grows over them, or let vines grow on them so that the tree may be strangled or its leaves deprived of light.



- Overfertilize your tree. This can "burn" roots or overstimulate crown growth, making it harder for the tree to survive drought.



- Keep the soil around the tree compacted to restrict passage of oxygen and water to the roots.



### TO SAVE A TREE

- In dry spells, water the entire area within and a little beyond the drip line. Water about once a week, enough to have the soil damp to a depth of 1 to 3 feet.

- Except for transplanted conifers and trees on very windy sites, staking is usually not necessary. If you must stake young trees, allow room for normal sway in the wind. This aids root development and strengthens the trunk. Cover wires with rubber or plastic to protect bark, and remove all wires after one year.



- Keep vines away from your tree. Cut existing vines into sections and carefully peel them from the tree's bark.
- Keep soil pores open with mulching around individual trees or by planting groups of trees in flower and groundcover beds.
- Fertilizing is usually unnecessary. Seek professional advice and you'll save money — and perhaps your tree.



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