Tree Tips Archives

FALL 2005
Fall Fertilizing - Newly planted urban trees often benefit from supplemental nutrition, especially around new-home construction where soil conditions can be poor. In the fall, apply a winter fertilizer (low N, high P), to stimulate root growth only. This helps new trees become established and better equips them for the next growing season. Broadcast fertilizer thoroughly beneath the tree's canopy, avoiding contact with the tree's trunk. Utilize a rainy day to apply or water by hand.

SPRING 2006
Getting to the *ROOT* of the Problem - Essential to a tree's survivability, roots are often left dysfunctional due simply to the soil in which they're planted. Highly compacted, poorly drained and void of nutrition and oxygen, construction soils used in commercial and residential development can literally choke the life from the hardiest of tree species. Mortality may range from one week to five or even ten years. This is unfortunate when most tree species live an easy 50 years and we are responsible for planting for the future! Correctly amended soil is a fundamental means of insuring the long-term survival of an appreciating investment - your trees. Healthy soil also promotes a healthier urban forest throughout Hoover. Arboricultural services exist today that can permanently amend soil structure and viability. Techniques like vertical mulching, radial mulching and soil injection-fertilization are used by Certified Arborists around the country. Contact your local Certified Arborist(s) to find out more.

FALL 2006
Dodging the Drought - Water is essential for tree survivability. Drought combined with typical urban stresses like compacted soils, root competition and even increased ambient temperature, can result in decline and mortality in trees. By correctly planting native tree species like bald cypress, sourwood, white oak and red maple, and by following a few basic maintenance fundamentals, you can help your trees survive the dry times. First and arguably the most critical maintenance item is proper mulching. Tree roots should be blanketed with a two to three inch deep layer of mulch that extends just beyond the dripline or outermost branch tips. Synthetic mulch products DO NOT provide the benefits of traditional, wood-based mulches. Second, stay ahead of the drought. Seasonal rain can be adequate but most young, urban trees depend on routine, supplemental watering for survival. Soaker hose type applications are very effective. Third, improve your soil. Urban soils can be down right rotten for tree health. With proper implementation, tree-specific soil amendments such as vertical mulching, radial trenching and Mycorrhizal inoculations can improve both soil nutrition and structure, creating more desirable growing conditions for trees.

WINTER 2006
Pruning Young Shade Trees - Winter is the ideal time to prune young, deciduous species of shade trees. Prune for structure by thinning to a strong, central leader and by removing damaged or wayward branches. Avoid flush cutting by pruning to just outside branch collars (i.e. swollen areas at branch attachments). Avoid removing lower limbs as they help to develop a sturdy trunk. Never top

your shade tree and always prune only what is necessary to promote health and vigor. A properly pruned shade tree can provide a host of environmental benefits and enjoyment for generations.

Fall 2007 - Winter 2008

Soil Testing - Urban trees almost always benefit from supplemental nutrition, especially around new construction where soil conditions are typically poor. Random applications of organic and/or chemical fertilizers can be beneficial but ***just*** fertilizing can also be a long-term mistake. A soil's nutrient levels can be completely void, deficient, or even toxic to trees and soil pH can also be unsuitable for sustainable growth. Soil testing is a simple and inexpensive process that can reveal potential problems, prescribe corrective measures, and ultimately build the foundation of more desirable soil conditions for your trees. Soil testing kits and procedures vary and are available through a variety of sources, such as the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, select plant nurseries, professional arborists or landscape contractors, and many feed/seed stores. Don't let your trees be underachievers! Test your soil to be sure it's making the grade.

Unique Trees of Hoover – Are your trees unique? If so, we want to know about them! From imports to domestics, unique trees of all ages, colors, shapes and sizes are growing in our City and benefiting our residents and businesses by raising property values, providing essential environmental functions, supporting wildlife and beautifying the landscape. For these and numerous other unique contributions, the Hoover Urban Forestry Department would like to showcase some of Hoover's more "interesting" trees via a developing new program entitled "Unique Trees of Hoover". For now, this program will be maintained entirely on the City's website but who knows what the future holds. If you have a unique candidate, please contact Colin Conner, Hoover City Forester, by email at connerc@ci.hoover.al.us or by phone at 739-7131. Trees will be photographed, measured, hugged and politely talked about.

SPRING - SUMMER 2008

Tree Planting Techniques - Take time this year to add value to your property, beauty to your community, and health to Hoover's urban forest by planting a tree! Start by selecting the right planting location. Look up, down and all around to insure your tree will have unobstructed growth throughout its lifetime, both above and below ground. Next, select a quality grown native tree species from a local plant nursery. Now prepare the planting site by digging a round hole that's 2 to 3 times greater in diameter but no deeper than your new tree's rootball. Thoroughly loosen the soil excavated from the planting hole and lightly amend it with organic matter. Scarify the sidewalls of the planting hole to allow better root penetration. Place the tree in the planting hole, insuring the top of the rootball is either flush with or slightly above grade with the surrounding soil. Level the tree by adjusting the rootball or adding soil beneath. Be sure to massage and separate outer roots so they run away from the rootball and not in circles. Once the tree is in place, add back and water in your loosened/amended soil in layers, as this will help to settle your tree into its new home. Avoid adding soil on top of the tree's rootball. Finally, add a two to three inch deep layer of mulch to the soil beneath the tree. This mulch layer should extend just beyond the tree's dripline or outermost branch tips. Avoid letting the mulch contact the trunk of the tree. Now, with your tree properly planted, it's well on its way to healthy, long-term growth. Keep an eye on your new tree for the first few years, watering and feeding when necessary.

FALL 2008 - WINTER 2009

Leaf Litter – Trash or Treasure? - Deciduous and evergreen trees naturally shed their leaves and needles. Leaf shedding occurs at various times of the year but is most prevalent during the Fall. Shedding can occur for a variety of reasons but is usually beneficial to tree health. When leaves are shed in forested areas, they typically decompose into the soil and are utilized by the surrounding ecology. When leaves are shed in urban areas, they are often discarded, typically down the nearest stormwater sewer. This process is harmful to local waterways and counterproductive to growing healthy trees, lawns and other plants. Leaves can be utilized as a highly effective and economical means of improving the overall health of any landscape area. Composting leaves creates a moistening and nutritious planting media that is especially effective at correcting deficiencies found in urban soils. Mulching leaves either directly into lawn areas or as ground cover for tree roots and planting beds, promotes plant health and improves overall soil condition. Best of all, these activities are inexpensive and their results are long lasting. This year, treasure your trees **and** the leaves they leave behind!

SPRING - SUMMER 2009

Don't just PLANT IT… PLAN IT - Because it's the current generation's responsibility to plant trees for the future and because the many economic, environmental and social benefits of trees aren't fully realized until trees begin to mature, it's critical that planning for a tree's new home be made an integral part of the planting process. Trees come pre-packaged in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Some trees grow large and some stay small. Some trees love sun but many prefer shade. Some trees prefer drier sites but some love water. These site and species characteristics define trees and make them unique. Trees can and do grow in less than ideal conditions but their full potential won't be realized unless their planting site is just right. To determine the site and species characteristics of a particular tree, take a casual stroll through one of Hoover's passive parks like Moss Rock, Veterans or Aldridge Gardens. This healthy method of research will provide a first hand look at native trees performing in their preferred habitat. If a nature walk is not your style, surf the Internet then visit a local plant nursery with questions in hand. The right tree properly planted in the right location can provide years… sometimes centuries of enjoyment and value. Many of the large trees now growing in Hoover and across the country didn't happen by accident. So this year, **plan**t your next tree (or trees) for the future!