

Preventative Care Results In Preservation of Trees

By Deb Nelson, Stoughton Tree Commission

Caring for trees starts at the point of purchase. Selecting the right tree for the right spot is one of the most important ways to care for a tree, but is very often overlooked. Different trees favor different environments. There are many that don't like how cold it gets in Wisconsin. There are some that don't like how cold it gets in Wisconsin. There are some that don't like the clay-like soil that we have in Stoughton. Some like sun and some like shade. There are trees that need lots of water and others that don't require much. And very few trees like the salt that melts off the roads in Wisconsin. Therefore it is very important to figure out where a tree is going to be planted and then choose a tree that will tolerate specific environmental conditions.

Many trees are doomed to fail the minute they are planted. This is because many trees are planted improperly. If a very tall tree is planted under power lines, excessive pruning will eventually lead to decline of the tree. If a tree is planted too deep, the roots may never get the air they need to survive. If container-grown trees are not root pruned before planting, this often leads to disaster. If burlap or cages are planted with the root balls, problems may go undetected for many years.

Basically, the BEST preventative care for a tree is to choose the proper tree for the proper spot and plant it properly.

Once the tree is established, pruning a tree properly in its life is a good way to effectively avoid many potential problems when the tree is older and larger. When done correctly, routine pruning of trees will prevent future defects. However, if done improperly, trees may begin to decay or exhibit structural problems in the future. Furthermore, trees should never be topped. The inevitable result of such pruning wounds is decay in the remaining stub, which then serves as a very poor support to any branches that subsequently form and rise above the cut, causing very large branches to break out unpredictably from above. Ultimately, it is better to remove a tree and replace it, than it is to top a tree.

Sometimes it is advantageous to try to prevent branches from splitting, by installing a support system. When done correctly by a trained arborist, it can extend the time a tree or its parts are safe. Done incorrectly, it creates a more serious hazard. Support systems should only be installed for trees that have significant historic or landscape value.

Finally, it is important to treat trees with respect. Give them water. Don't tear their limbs. Don't tear up their roots. Don't hit them with lawnmowers. And have them inspected from time to time. After all, the oldest largest living things on our planet are probably worth it.