

Caring for your New Landscaping

Regardless of the type or size of your new landscape, some maintenance will be required to ensure that it stays healthy and looking the way it was designed to look. The guidelines below will help you get the most out of your new investment. As always, please contact us if you have any questions that aren't answered here.

SECTION 1 – Plants

You have made an investment in quality plant material and have taken the time and effort to improve your landscape. Keep watching your plants - you can avoid costly replacements by monitoring the soil moisture and nutrients, checking for problems, insects, and keeping unwanted weeds out. Use the following guidelines below for the best plant results.

Watering

95% of the problems with new plant material can be attributed to improper watering. It isn't easy to know exactly how much to water. If you over-do it, the plant will drown in soil filled with water where oxygen should be. If you don't water enough, the plant will wilt. When in doubt about whether you are watering adequately, don't just look at the soil; stick your finger into the soil to a depth of about three inches. If the soil sticks to your finger, it is probably moist enough. The best way to water is to *apply it at a rate the soil will absorb without pooling or runoff*. Clay soils will require less frequent watering (possibly once or twice per week), whereas, sandy soils require more frequent watering (possibly two or three times per week).

If you are using a sprinkler system, runoff may occur or water may pool before it soaks in. Set watering duration to shut off just as pooling or runoff begins. Then set each zone to operate more often, such as twice a day or more days of the week, but do not increase the duration. Rainfall should be taken into account very carefully. During periods of inadequate rainfall or prolonged drought, it is important to make sure the plant receives adequate water. Also, during hot and/or windy conditions plants may require supplemental watering. Winds cause the plants to lose excessive water from their leaves.

Lastly, at least 3 inches of mulch should be used because it not only cools the plant's root system, but it retains moisture in the soil around the plant.

Fertilization

Watering supplies many, but not all, of the nutrients required by plants. Other valuable nutrients can be supplied through fertilization. Fertilization is critical to the health of your new plants, especially in the first year.

Fertilization is much easier than many people think. The label on the fertilizer package provides the necessary information to apply the product correctly to your planting areas. Fertilizers are classified by their "ratios". An example of a fertilizer ratio would be 10-10-10. This means that this particular fertilizer contains 10% nitrogen, 10% phosphorus, and 10% potassium. Most plants respond well to balanced fertilizers with ratios of 12-12-12, 6-6-6 or similar formulations.

How to fertilize:

Trees, shrubs, perennials, and ground covers: Established plants should be fertilized twice per year. The best time to fertilize is in the early spring, then again in mid-summer. We recommend a balanced fertilizer such as Miracle Gro® or Schultz General Purpose plant food.

Rhododendrons, Azaleas, other broadleaf evergreens: Fertilize TWICE per growing season – once early in the spring as soon as the soil starts to warm up and root growth begins (or in early May for non-flowering plants), then again 6 weeks later. Use an acid-type fertilizer such as Hollytone™ or Miracid™.

Roses: Fertilize in spring when freezing is past and the new growth is well established. Plants should be fertilized again in 4 to 6 weeks if the plants look like they are deficient in nutrients. Do not use fertilizer after July 1. Feed with a rose-specific fertilizer.

Annuals and Biennials: Condition soil with fertilizer before planting, and again in mid-summer with a product such as Osmocote.

Hardy bulbs: (Tulips, Daffodils, Crocus, etc.) Fertilize after plants bloom with Osmocote or bone meal.

Tender bulbs (Dahlia, Gladiolus, Canna, etc.): Condition soil with fertilizer before planting.

Staking

Staking enables trees to establish a root system deep into the ground. Any stakes, wire (or nylon) tying materials and hoses that may have been used to support planting materials during establishment should be removed one year after installation. If wraps were used on trees planted during the fall or winter, they should be removed the following spring. Allowing the staking and wrapping materials to remain in place longer than specified will cause damage, and in some cases, death to the plant.

Pruning

Although some landscapes are less maintenance-intensive than others, no landscape is absolutely “maintenance free”.

Pruning, thinning and occasional weeding are vital to keeping your landscape plants looking the way they were intended to look. When your plants were installed, they were pruned for you. By familiarizing yourself with the following techniques, you can ensure that your landscape stays looking the way it was designed to.

CUTTING / THINNING – This is accomplished with hand pruners (or loppers for larger branches of 1” or more). By cutting back and thinning you are controlling the size of the plant and encouraging flowering, growth direction, etc. Prune flowering shrubs AFTER they bloom so that you do not cut off the flowers. When thinning, cut crossing or conflicting branches, and “open up” the plant to let light reach the rest of it.

PINCHING – By using your thumb and forefinger to remove the tips of the new growth, side branching is encouraged, and the plant size is controlled.

REMOVING SUCKERS – Suckers are the stems that grow up from the root system at a plant’s trunk. Cut all suckers with hand pruners. (This step may be necessary more often with plants such as Serviceberry, Crabapple & Cherry.

Weed Control

To maintain the look of your landscape, periodic weed control will be necessary. Although there are many weed control products on the market, the tried and true method of pulling weeds by hand will often be necessary. Mulching and/or application of weed control products will not prevent all weeds from occurring.

Pre-emergent weed control products (such as Preen) may be used in bed areas. Follow the directions on the package. Be careful around newly planted trees and shrubs. Where ground cover such as Pachysandra, Myrtle or Ajuga have been planted, it is best to wait until the plants are touching (sometimes a year or so) before applying pre-emergent weed control products.

Keeping at least three inches of shredded mulch on bed areas will go a long way to suppressing unwanted weeds. This may mean adding mulch, or at least tilling up the mulch, yearly.

SECTION 2 – Lawns

Grass Seed

For grass areas that have been seeded, keep the area consistently moist (but not flooded) and undisturbed for at least five days. Straw may have been used to protect the seed, and it will decompose naturally. Seeded lawns should be fertilized in the Fall, or as outlined by your lawn care professional. We recommend a balanced fertilizer such as Scott’s Turf Builder™ for lawn fertilization. Note that you should put at least 1/2” of water on your lawn immediately after fertilizing for the first time. If you do not put enough water on your new lawn after fertilizing, your new lawn could burn. The new lawn may be cut for the first time when the grass is approximately 4” high.

Hydro-seed

Hydro-seeding is the process of mixing mulch, seed, fertilizer and water as a mixture in a tank, which is then sprayed on a prepared grade. Keep the hydro-seeded area consistently moist (but not flooded) and undisturbed for at least five days. Since hydro-seed mixture may contain different types of seed, they will begin to fill in at different rates - so don’t worry if your new lawn looks sparse at first. Fertilize your new lawn about 6 weeks after hydro-seeding. The new lawn should then be re-fertilized about every 6 weeks through the summer. After the lawn is well established, the lawn should continue to be fertilized every 6 to 8 weeks. We recommend a balanced fertilizer such as Scott’s Turf Builder™ for lawn fertilization.

Note that you should put at least 1/2” of water on your lawn immediately after fertilizing for the first time. If you do not put enough water on your new lawn after fertilizing, your new lawn could burn. The new lawn may be cut for the first time when the grass is approximately 4” high.

Sod

Where new sod has been installed, keep the sodded area moist, but not flooded. Proper watering is critical for establishment of new sod. You can resume regular mowing after about 15 days. Use caution when walking on the new sod, especially when the ground below is very wet. Wait six weeks after sod installation to fertilize.

SECTION 3 - Brick Paved Surfaces

Your new brick pavement surface is ready for use right away. (However, stay away from edge areas for at least 48 hours) Sealing the brick is not absolutely necessary, but is beneficial for a couple of reasons. First, sealing prepares the surface for possible stains and makes them easier to clean (if the pavers are located in an area that may be exposed to food or drink spills such as patios, or oil/antifreeze stains such as driveways, it may be wise to seal).

Secondly, sealer helps to stabilize the joints between the brick by acting as a “glue” to keep sand from washing away. Sealer may be applied with a roller or a garden sprayer. We recommend an oil-based concrete sealer such as Uni-Lock brand sealer, available at landscape supply stores. Note that brick paved surfaces should not be sealed for at least six months after installation to allow salts and additives in the brick to purge naturally.

Jointing sand can be swept into the surfaces thoroughly every spring to replenish the minimal amounts that may have been washed away. Do not use Calcium Chloride or other salts to melt snow on these surfaces, as over time, damage can occur to the stone. Sand can be used, or if salt is applied, it should be rinsed of as soon as possible.

SECTION 4 - Dry-Laid Stone (no mortar used)

Dry laid masonry surfaces can be subjected to regular traffic right away. Keep in mind that several sandings may be required before the stones will lay completely still when the sand gets worked into the joints. Dry-laid walks and walls are not adhered in place, so some shifting of the stones over the course of time is natural. Sealing these types of stone projects is not necessary, but if sealer is desired, a general brick paver or masonry sealer is adequate. **Use care when shoveling snow on these surfaces due to irregular joints.** Do not use Calcium Chloride or other salts to melt snow on these surfaces, as over time, damage can occur to the stone. Sand can be used, or if salt is applied, it should be rinsed of as soon as possible.

SECTION 5 – Wet-Laid Stone (mortar used in all or some joinery)

Surfaces (or walls) should not be subjected to use for at least 48 hours to allow for proper curing. Sealing these types of stone projects is not necessary, but if sealer is desired, a general brick paver or masonry sealer is adequate. **Use care when shoveling snow on these surfaces due to irregular joints.** Do not use Calcium Chloride or other salts to melt snow on these surfaces, as over time, damage can occur to the stone. Sand can be used, or if salt is applied, it should be rinsed of as soon as possible.

SECTION 6 – Decks and Wood Structures

Decks are ready for immediate use once complete. (In the case of treated lumber, use caution because surfaces can remain slippery for several weeks after installation)

Pressure treated lumber should eventually be sealed, and can even be painted. The wood should not be sealed for at least 3 months after installation to allow the pores to open and surface treatments to dry. Wood can be painted at this time as well – but best results are achieved by waiting a year or so to paint. Cedar and redwood lumber should also be sealed, but again should not be sealed for at least 3 months. Prior to sealing, wash decking thoroughly with a power washer, pre-mixed deck wash or half-and-half mixture of bleach and water. Allow the deck to dry for 24 hours prior to sealing. Sealing should be done every one to two years in the fall. (Sealers tend to protect horizontal deck surfaces for 1-2 years and vertical surfaces for 3-4 years.)

SECTION 7 – Drainage and Downspouts

Make sure that you keep all drainage pipe exits and pop-up drain emitters free of ice, especially during the spring time thaw. If pop-ups or drain pipe ends become blocked by ice, the drainage from downspouts could back up and come out at the downspout, close to the foundation of the house. It is imperative that these drainage systems remain free flowing to get water away from the house as quickly as possible. It's a good idea to clear snow/ice from pop-ups when the weather is warm enough to start melting snow on your roof.

SECTION 8 – Winter Preparation / Protection

Blow out irrigation system. Drain any garden hoses. Remove pumps from water features. Cut down perennials.

Apply **Wilt-Pruf** (www.wiltpruf.com - like a waxy film) on all plants. (Purchased from www.AMLeo.com)

Follow label instructions. Burlap newly installed arborvitae. Add a few mothballs at base of plants susceptible to rodent damage. (We can perform all of these services for you also.) All evergreens should continue to be watered, even by hand after irrigation system is blown out, to minimize winter burn.

Please call us with any questions on maintaining your new landscaping.

And remember, Metro Star Brick Pavers & Landscaping provides affordable Horticultural Maintenance Services to help keep your landscape looking the way it was designed to. Please give us a call for more detail on landscape maintenance services. And thanks again for your business!