

Converting Landscapes Under Mature Trees



Mature trees are the most valuable part of many landscapes. Not only are they valuable, but are impossible to replace. If you're considering removing grass under mature trees that you would like to retain, think about the following things before you start your project.



Water regularly

Mature trees growing in lawn areas are accustomed to regular watering. If you remove the grass and stop watering regularly, the tree is likely to die. In order to maintain the tree's health, you must continue water regularly, although it can be much less frequently than before.

Current recommendations from tree experts state that most trees should be given about 15 gallons per inch of trunk diameter twice per month. The water should be applied at the dripline (the area of soil directly underneath the tips of the branches) extending about 5 to 10 feet beyond the dripline. This is commonly accomplished by converting an automatic spray irrigation system to a drip irrigation system that delivers water to the dripline and beyond.



No rock under mature trees

Mature trees grown in lawn areas are accustomed to cool soil temperatures and regularly moist soil. If you install rock around the base of a tree, the rock will reflect significant amounts of heat, leading to warmer, drier soil. This can cause trees to slowly decline over a period of years and eventually die.

A more effective approach is to install a 4 inch depth of wood or bark mulch under the tree. Wood and bark mulches keep soil significantly moister and cooler than rock products, allowing the tree to adapt to less frequent watering. Be sure to keep mulch at least 6 inches away from the base of the trunk. If mulch covers the trunk of the tree, it can create moist conditions that allow diseases to infect the trunk.



Landscaping

Tree roots are extensive. They often are growing throughout the front and backyard. Widespread trenching and rototilling can disturb roots and cause decline of the tree. Instead, carefully remove unwanted grass under trees by hand digging or spraying with an herbicide that contains the active ingredient, "glyphosate." Since glyphosate is absorbed only through leaves (not bark) and has no residual activity once it hits the soil, it will not damage a tree's health. A lawn core aeration machine can be used to alleviate soil compaction in a tree's root zone.

Finding plants that will successfully grow in dry, shady areas underneath mature trees can be challenging. Most shade-tolerant landscape plants need consistently moist soil to perform well. In order to reduce your overall landscape water use, try find other areas of your landscape besides underneath trees to plant densely.

Furthermore, don't build up the soil around the trunk to creating a planting bed. This can cause trunk rot to invade the tree when the bark is constantly moist or buried. Often the best groundcover under mature trees is wood or bark mulch. The area under mature trees can make great seating areas, areas for garden art or pots with shade-tolerant plants.

Water efficiency videos are online at [youtube.com/springsutilities](https://www.youtube.com/springsutilities).

