



livingearth
SUPPLIES

How To – Caring For Heat Stressed Trees.

This summer in Mudgee has been very tough. We have had no spring rain, high spring heat, scorching summer temperatures and hot winds. Customers are finding that their trees are suffering from a range of heat stress issues. Trees old and new are wilting, leaves are browning off, limbs dropping and plants looking generally hot and bothered.

To care for a heat stressed tree first check the soil to see if it's dry or moist. If the soil around the roots of the tree is still moist hold off on watering for a day or so. How do you know if the soil is moist? You have to get down around the root ball and drip line, stick a finger in and if your finger comes out dirty with cool soil stuck to it, the soil is fine. If your finger is dusty and no soil is sticking to it, it is time to water. Very scientific.

When you plant trees (and shrubs or anything really) we will always tell you to mulch. If in a lawn, clear all grass to the drip line of your tree, approximately a 1m diameter. Grass and weeds will compete and out compete with your tree for nutrients and water. In a garden or strip planting (hedges), mulch the whole bed – every bit of exposed soil needs to be covered with mulch. If you mulch and water only around the tree, the dry bed will wick away the moisture and try and steal it for itself. Cover the whole bed and keep the whole area moist.

Water your tree deeply, once a week. By deeply, stand there for 10 minutes with a hose and soak the soil from the trunk to drip line. If you have irrigation, set the appropriate time. If they are in a pot you may need to water every day, possibly twice. If you are doing soil checks during the week and midway through the soil is dry, may be you need to water twice a week BUT, don't overdo it. You can also kill your trees with kindness. Too much water will also put your trees under stress. They will be unable to take up nutrients from the bogged soil around it so combined with heat stress you can kill your trees.

Some soils become hydrophobic (moisture repellent) if unwatered for an extended amount of time. You will notice the water beads off and doesn't sink into the bed. If this occurs you will need to apply as soil wetting agent to the area.

Generally heat stressed trees cannot get enough moisture into their leaves quick enough before it begins to evaporate. Think pumpkin plants during the heat of the day that wilt then perk up at the end of the day once the temperatures cool. Trees are the same. Water them in the cool of the

evening or morning. Give the foliage a light shower with the hose and give them a foliar feed with a seaweed or fish emulsion. Plants can absorb nutrients through their leaves and bark. Remember, you don't need to pick off burnt, crispy leaves. Leave them on the tree as they will act as protection for the new growth that will start to come through when conditions ease.

If your tree is new or still a baby or in a harsh spot in the garden, you can also set up shade cloth or hessian around it for some wind and heat protection. You could also set up a shade cloth over the tree during the heat of the day.

Keeping trees as healthy as possible during these periods also helps reduce the risk of pest and disease attack. Hopefully by enacting some of these measures you will be able to get your trees through this summer.

