



# Street Tree Care



OBJECTIVE	CATEGORY	DIFFICULTY	GROUP SIZE	TIME
Care for 1 street tree bed	Compost Application	Easy - all ages w/ adult supervision	2 - 4	1 hr
TOOLS & MATERIALS		OPTIONAL ITEMS		
(2 - 4) pairs of gardening gloves		(1) 5-gallon bucket and/or hose		
(2 - 4) gardening tools (hand fork, trowel, hand cultivator, shovel, or rake)		(1) wheelbarrow, wagon, folding shopping cart, or car		
		(1) sharps container with lid or a heavy duty plastic laundry bottle		
		(1) <a href="#">sign</a> - homemade or purchased		
		Example messages: "This tree is cared for by [your name, organization, or school]" "Refrain from walking on the soil" "Please don't litter" "Pick up after your dog" "No Pee Please"		
(1) trash bag				
(1) recycling bag				
(1) compost bag				
(1) 1-cubic ft / 20 lbs bag of compost				
(1) 2-cubic ft bag of mulch				

## HOW TO

1. IDENTIFY a street tree that has accessible soil (not paved over). Bring your tools & materials to the tree.
2. CLEAN UP AREA: Wearing gloves, remove any mulch that contains dog waste, road salt, or other contaminants, and place in a trash bag. Remove litter and place in a trash or recycling bag. Carefully remove any sharp items and place in a sharps container.
3. Pull undesired plants (i.e. [weeds](#)), fallen leaves & mulch (that looks clean) and place in a compost bag.
4. PREP SOIL: Look at how hard and compact the soil is and pick an appropriate tool to gently loosen up the first 1" of topsoil throughout the entire bed. Try not to damage the roots while loosening the soil.
5. COMPOST: If the soil is easy to dig into and looks healthy, apply a light layer of compost (1/2"). If the soil looks grey and compacted, apply a heavier layer (1"). Using your tool, lightly scratch the compost into the soil over the entire bed, 6" away from the trunk.
6. MULCH: Apply an even layer of mulch (1-3"), keeping the mulch 6" away from the trunk.
7. KEEP AWAY FROM TRUNK: Brush away compost and mulch that touches the tree trunk. There should be a 6" ring around the base of the trunk with no compost and mulch. Avoid covering any large roots.
8. WATER: If you can, water the tree. Young trees benefit from 15-20 gallons of water a week. Established trees benefit from 8-10 gallons per week.
9. SIGN (Optional): Insert a sign on a small stake into the soil or attach it to the tree guard. Do NOT attach any signs to the trunk or branches of the tree as this may damage the tree.
10. CLEAN UP: Pack up your tools and excess materials. Place trash, recycling, and compost bags in the appropriate public or private bins. Record your care activity on the [NYC Tree Map](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
<b>Why are so many types of tools listed?</b>	Different tools work best for different tree bed soil conditions. Test each one out to learn about its best uses! Also, we recognize that you may not have access to all of these tools. Using what is available to you is better than not caring for a tree at all.
<b>Why should I take care of street trees?</b>	Street trees are alive and beautiful– they offer a vital connection to nature for all of us who live in the city. They also provide shade and cooling, improve air quality, and reduce stormwater runoff into drains. Street trees also endure constant stress from litter and contaminants, compacted soils, and lack of water. They need our help to stay alive and continue to thrive!
<b>What is the difference between compost &amp; wood chip mulch?</b>	Compost is a finely textured soil amendment that improves soil structure, increases the soil's ability to hold moisture, and feeds plants with necessary nutrients. Mulch is a protective covering of coarse wood chips that slows water evaporation, suppresses weeds, stabilizes soil temperature, and acts as a barrier from dog waste, road salt, and chemicals.
<b>Do I need to use both compost &amp; mulch?</b>	You can use either compost or mulch if that is all you have, but it is best to use both. Applying compost directly to the soil provides slow release nutrients that feed the tree. Adding wood chip mulch over the compost prevents the compost from blowing away or washing into waterways.
<b>Why keep compost &amp; mulch away from tree trunks?</b>	If compost and mulch touch the trunk, they introduce moisture, which can rot the bark and cause disease in the tree.
<b>Why is pet urine bad for street trees?</b>	When many dogs pass by and pee on the same tree every day, it leads to an excess of salt, acid, and urea in the soil and on the trunk of the tree. This impairs the tree's ability to absorb water, weakens the tree's bark (making it susceptible to disease), and creates toxic levels of nitrogen in the soil. The high number of dogs in NYC makes it essential for pet owners to train their dogs to pee away from our street trees.
<b>Why are pet feces harmful?</b>	Dog feces in tree beds builds up levels of nitrogen and phosphorus that are toxic to trees. Feces also contains pathogens that can harm humans and contaminate our waterways. Picking up after your pet keeps our community safe, clean, and beautiful!
<b>What kinds of pathogens are in pet feces?</b>	Common bacteria include Campylobacter, E. Coli, Salmonella, and Yersinia. These can cause diarrhea, pain, vomiting, fever, and life-threatening infections. Common parasites include Giardia, Cyclospora, Cryptosporidium, roundworm, and tapeworm. These can cause stomach/ intestinal diseases and also blindness. (Canadian Public Health Association. Human Diseases Transmitted by Dog Poop. <a href="https://www.cpha.ca/human-diseases-transmitted-dog-poop">https://www.cpha.ca/human-diseases-transmitted-dog-poop</a> )
<b>How can I continue to care for street trees going forward?</b>	You and your friends can follow this guide once or twice a year in autumn or spring. Ensure that you do not raise the level of the soil over many seasons, as this can rot the trunk and impair the roots' ability to access oxygen. If the soil/mulch level rises up by more than a few inches, reduce the amount of compost and mulch application. One of the best ways to care for your street tree is watering it, especially in the summer or during droughts. If you are having trouble deciding on which trees need your care the most, keep in mind that newly planted trees and younger trees are the most vulnerable.