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Trees add grace and grandeur to a landscape. Because they have probably been growing in the same place for years and years, it is easy to overlook them. They need care, however, to remain healthy.

Proper watering, pruning, and fertilizing will keep them strong and more resistant to drought, insects, and disease. A sick tree will let you know if it's in trouble. Look for sparse foliage, numerous dead twigs, shrunk and discolored leaves. If you notice these signs, take action quickly.

Insects and disease can be very harmful to trees. Because there are many different kinds, consult a professional tree care specialist for identification and advice about proper treatment.

Watering

Young trees should be watered regularly and deeply. Older trees only need to be watered during hot, dry weather with a deep and thorough soaking once a week.

Fertilizing

Yearly fertilizing encourages the growth and flowering of your trees. Trees need adequate fertilizer, especially when weakened by drought, insects or disease.

The best time to fertilize a tree is in late fall or early spring. An experienced tree care specialist can recommend the proper type and amount of fertilizer for the trees in your yard.

Pruning

Pruning a young tree is vital to its future growth, yet many people are reluctant to do it. Pruning is not hard to learn and is important in order to shape the tree and strengthen its structure.

You can prune smaller, older trees yourself to remove branches which endanger their health. Dead, dying, and infested branches should be removed immediately. Other

branches, which are in danger of falling because of their own weight, should be removed before they cause injury.

Correct pruning is essential to allow the wound to seal. Each branch has what is called a "branch collar," the raised or bulging area where the branch meets the trunk. Pruning cuts should be made just outside the branch collar without cutting into it at all. The lower edge should be farther away from the trunk than the top edge.

When pruning large limbs, be especially careful. Their weight could cause the limb to tear loose and strip bark. Make a bottom cut a foot or so from the trunk and a second top cut several inches out from the first one. The limb should fall from its own weight. Cut the remaining stub off at the edge of the branch collar.

By pruning properly and leaving the branch collar unharmed, the wound will callus over without decaying. Tree wound dressings are not necessary and can actually encourage decay if applied too thickly.

Topping a tree refers to the pruning of all the branches in a tree's crown. Topping does not distinguish between healthy and unhealthy growth. The result is a tree with only the stubs of the largest limbs remaining. Topping drastically affects the tree's shape. The main reason for topping trees is to remove branches that are too long or too weak. It is better to remove these branches through selective cutting or thinning.

With proper care, trees add beauty to the setting of your home. Well-maintained trees enhance the overall appearance of your home.

