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Caring for your new plants

1.) WATER is the most important need of any landscape plant. In general, plants need approximately 1 inch of water per week. The best way to water trees is with a slow trickle of water that soaks deeply into the soil to reach all of the roots for 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the size of the tree. Make sure the water is not running off away from the roots of the plant. The easiest method of watering perennials and shrubs is with a soaker hose placed close to the stems of the plants. Run for about 30 minutes a day in the early morning or late evening. If a sprinkler is used, it is best to water early in the morning. In order to test the moisture of the soil, use the finger test. Stick your finger through the mulch and into the soil to a depth of three inches. If the soil feels moist, do not water. If it feels dry, then water is needed. Do not wait to water until the leaves are wilting, as this causes too much stress on the plants. If your soil is heavy clay, be careful not to over water, as clay soils do not drain well, and too much water can be just as detrimental as not enough water. Soil conditions can vary greatly around your house and depending on the amount of sunlight plants receive some plants may need watered more often than others. Watering needs also vary through the seasons of the year.

Spring- In a normal spring, rainfall will take care of most of the watering needs. Check the soil 1 or 2 times a week through the end of May using the finger test. Pay particular attention to first year plants. Summer is the most important time of year to check the soil for moisture. With newly installed plants the soil needs to be checked at least twice a week, and in especially dry conditions, three to four times per week. After the first year the soil should be checked once a week. If watering in the heat of the day, it is important not to spray the water over the top of shrubs and trees as it will scorch the leaves. Early morning or late evening water is best for the plants.

Fall -This season is often ignored. It is important to keep the plants watered in September and October to ensure that the plants are not stressed going into winter. Check the soil once a week.

2.) FERTILIZER is essential to plant and root growth. A slow release granular fertilizer, such as Osmocote, is typically the best option. Osmocote only needs to be applied about every three months. Plants that like acidic soil can be fertilized with Hollytone. Always water in after fertilizing. Miracle Gro can be used every two weeks when watering, if preferred. Shrubs and Perennials- Sprinkle one tablespoon of granular fertilizer around the base of shrubs, and one teaspoon around perennials. If any fertilizer gets on the leaves or limbs be sure to brush it off or the leaves can be burned. Trees- Spread two to three tablespoons of granular fertilizer around the base of the tree. It should be applied near the drip line, the outer edge of branches of the tree, as this is where the feeder roots are located. Tree fertilizer spikes are also an excellent way to fertilize trees because they place the fertilizer closer to the roots. Evergreen Shrubs- These shrubs prefer an acidic soil and would benefit from an acid supplement, such as Hollytone or Mir-Acid.

3.) MULCH improves the aesthetics of landscaping, retains moisture, prevents drastic soil temperature changes, and reduces weed growth. An application of two to three inches of mulch is recommended every one to two years. Do not allow more than 3 inches of mulch to accumulate around plants as this can prevent moisture and air from reaching the soil.

4.) PRUNING improves the general shape, appearance, and vigor of your shrubs and trees. It is also necessary to keep some shrubs at the desired size. Never remove more than one third of a plants branches in one season. Prune just above another branch or leaf. Do not leave branch "stubs". Most shrubs should be pruned when dormant, in early spring before new growth emerges. Spring blooming shrubs should only be pruned shortly after they flower so that the flower buds are not removed.

5.) STAKES may be needed on some newly planted trees to prevent leaning from strong winds. Stakes should not be left on trees for more than one year. If left on any longer, the tree could be seriously damaged.