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OAKS IN THE HOME GARDEN

Oaks can prosper in close proximity to human habitation if care is taken to preserve the basic elements of the natural oak environment. Garden settings include many hazards, such as paving, trenching, etc., but there are several other considerations. If the needs and limitations of mature oaks are not part of gardening design and procedures, well-meaning people can make serious mistakes.

CARE AND FEEDING OF MATURE OAKS

In approaching the design and care of your oak garden, periodically evaluate the health of your oaks. The information in "Oak Health Check" in this newsletter should help you with this. If problems are evident, consult an arborist specializing in oaks. If your oaks pass their health check, they will not need a lot of attention from you as long as care is taken to preserve the basic elements of their environment. The following information can guide your care of mature, healthy oaks.

Pruning. Mature oaks do not require pruning except to remove dead, weakened, diseased, or dangerous branches. Sometimes a light thinning, called "daylighting", of 10 or 20 percent of the leaf area from branches three to six inches in diameter can benefit a tree by opening its canopy to deeper light penetration. This also reduces wind resistance

and the weight of branches. Avoid excessive pruning, however, as it stimulates vigorous sprouting that is highly vulnerable to damage from mildew.

Light pruning can be done at any time of the year. Heavy pruning, however, should be made during the dormant period (winter) on deciduous oaks and during July and August on evergreen oaks. The most important factor in pruning is to make all cuts correctly. Avoid leaving branch stubs and **DO NOT PAINT CUTS!** For more advice consult an arborist or recent publications on pruning techniques.

Watering. Mature oaks in wildland settings are adapted to dry, summer conditions. Summer irrigation will doom the adult tree (see "Diseases") and is to be avoided, especially near the base of the tree.

Do not water even ornamentals planted under oaks. If they need watering they do not belong there. If the winter season is unusually dry, a supplemental watering in the early spring can complement natural rainfall. Water deeply in the outer two-thirds of the root zone. A similar watering can be repeated once or twice during especially dry summers.

Feeding. A healthy, mature oak under natural conditions does not require supplemental feeding. But when the oak exhibits disease or stress, or when growth is poor and its natural fertilizer supply (the leaf drop and organic litter that decomposes under the canopy) is removed, supplemental feeding can be beneficial. Young oaks can be fertilized to encourage rapid growth.



