

# Celebrate Arbor Day by treating trees well



Lloyd Singleton

## A little TLC of young trees can help pay lots of 'green' dividends down the road

Miss Anderson was blonde, sweet and so pretty. As a kindergarten teacher, I figured she would consider marrying me if I could gift her with a most magnificent drawing of a tree. I loved story time in the playground in the shade of huge oak; her laughter and singing voice made mid-day naptime a dreamworld. I had to get the drawing just right.

My older brother equipped me with the sketch pad and pencils with HB lead. He coached me to study a tree closely to capture every detail. My subject was the playground oak, a symbol of the long-lasting love of this five-year-old freckled boy for his teacher. As a lover of nature I studied the happy tree, illustrating the broad branches of the canopy, the gazillions of leaves, the wide, sturdy trunk growing from a spreading root base that gripped and balanced and held fast to the playground's earth. As a left-hander, my pencil drawing had a romantic smudged appearance. I rolled it neatly with a ribbon closure and shyly handed it to Miss Anderson on the last day of class.

This is a special week for a focus on the details of nature in general and trees specifically. Wednesday was the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, and Friday was National Arbor Day, a celebration of trees. Our community has done a good job planting trees. Over the past few winter months, the combined efforts of Alliance for Cape



A properly installed young tree has no mound of mulch, stakes or ties. [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

Fear Trees, City of Wilmington, Plastic Ocean Project's 'Trees-4-Trash', TreeFest and N.C. Cooperative Extension - New Hanover County

have provided over 10,000 new trees for the area.

Now it's time to care for young trees properly.

**Do not mound mulch up**

**to the trunk of trees:** It kills them with a slow, agonizing death. They need their roots to spread out and breath at the surface of the soil. Pull it

away, expose a root flare at the base of the trunk. A moat of mulch around the outside of the rootball is okay if you're trying to provide water for a newly planted tree, but mulch should NEVER touch the trunk of a tree. Make sure you can always see a flare at the base of the tree.

**Remove nursery stake, tape:**

The young tree was staked in the nursery to help it grow straight. It's out of the nursery now and the stake should go. Those tough plastic ties and tagging tape can girdle a rapidly growing young tree. Cut them off now to prevent further damage.

**Consider root ball bracing:**

Many staking and guying methods are ineffective and are left on too long, causing damage to the trunk where attached. Root ball bracing prevents this damage and allows movement of the young trunk which develops "wind firmness", allowing a more storm resilient tree.

**Prune young trees for good structure:**

NCSU's Horticulture Expert Barb Fair says "young tree pruning is critical to the development of the future structure of shade trees, in particular. Proper pruning at a young age can remove codominant leaders that could break later in the life of the tree. Additionally, removing branches when they are small keeps pruning wounds small."

Following the summer break after kindergarten, the new closer-to-home elementary school opened up. I never saw Miss Hatfield again, but know she still thinks of me and that perfect tree with its broad base of roots. Take care of your young trees so they can grow to be a mature subject of a youngster's drawing.

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