

High Desert Gardening

March 2022

Spring Gardening at Mirehaven

Sharon M. Douglas

1. Don't Forget Your Streetscape and Yard Trees

According to the Architectural Review Committee (ARC) Design Guidelines (Revised December 13, 2021), the Streetscape is defined as the area between the street and the sidewalk ([https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/Governing+Documents/Design+Guidelines\\$12c+Amended+12-12-2021.pdf](https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/Governing+Documents/Design+Guidelines$12c+Amended+12-12-2021.pdf)). A Streetscape tree is one of the deciduous trees (Appendices D & F, Design Guidelines) planted by Pulte, the developer. There is one Streetscape tree for each homeowner property and additional Streetscape trees planted in common areas.

Homeowners are responsible for maintaining the tree planted in the Streetscape in front of each house as well as one other tree planted in each front yard. These need to be maintained by proper watering, fertilizing (when necessary), removing stakes (when appropriate) and pruning.

- Watering- This is the most important aspect of tree care, especially in light of the current and predicted continued drought for the Albuquerque area. Fortunately, Mirehaven residents all have drip irrigation systems installed by the contractor. This type of system is the most efficient for our climate and the high desert. However, when watering with a drip irrigation system, you need to “think hours not minutes”—using deep, but infrequent watering (1-2 times/week).

It is important to remember that as your trees grow, you will need to reposition the emitters out away from the base of the tree, increase the amount of water delivered, or add another line and emitter nozzle to the plant. Water should be applied out to and slightly beyond the drip line of the tree canopy (Figure 1).

A comprehensive article on watering trees, as well as helpful references, can be found in the LTC March (2) 2021 Newsletter:

<https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/LTC+Newsletters/March+2021+Two.pdf>.

The information provided by this Newsletter is for general information purposes only. All information is researched and compiled in good faith; however, no responsibility is assumed for any problems associated with the use of products or services mentioned in the Newsletter. No endorsement of products or companies is intended, nor is criticism of unnamed products or companies implied. If the reader uses any resource, service, product, or tool (“Resources”) mentioned in the Newsletter, the reader agrees to use the Resources responsibly for their intended use and in accordance with laws, regulations, product labels, and generally accepted practices or guidelines. From time to time the Newsletter provides links to other information sources. If the Reader chooses to use these links, then it is at the Reader’s own risk and Reader assumes responsibility for any problems associated with using the link or using information contained therein.

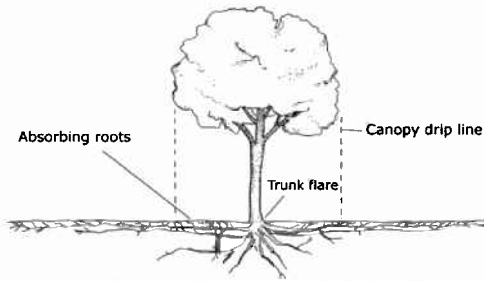


Figure 1. Diagram showing the drip line of the tree canopy and location of water-absorbing, functional roots.

Credit to:

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/11-woody-ornamentals>

Additional questions about using drip irrigation can also be found in the LTC March (4) 2021 Newsletter: <https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/LTC+Newsletters/March+2021+Four.pdf> .

- **Fertilizing-** The main reason for fertilizing trees in the landscape is to maintain their vigor so they will be able to resist environmental stresses, diseases, and pests. However, over-fertilizing can make trees more vulnerable to these same stresses. In this light, many experts suggest that fertilizers be used very lightly with ornamental trees—following the less-is-more philosophy. The general rule of thumb is to allow trees to get established for several years before fertilizing them. The goal for the first few years after planting is for the tree to put its energy into developing a healthy root system, not in growing the top shoots and branches.

One way to determine if a tree needs fertilizer is to look at the tree: signs of poor nutrition include tree growth (e.g., twig growth on a young tree should be ~9-12 inches per year), pale green or yellow leaves, mottled patterns between the veins, dead spots, stunted leaves, or

premature loss of leaves. However, these same symptoms may also be caused by many other factors such as poor planting practices and incorrect watering. When in doubt, it is important to avoid fertilizing any drought-stressed tree.

After you've assessed the health of your tree and reviewed the factors listed above, you decide your trees could benefit from fertilizer. The type of the fertilizer that you use is not especially critical, as long as it is NOT a “weed and feed” product. You can purchase fertilizers that are specially formulated for trees, or you can use a general purpose fertilizer. It helps to follow the “less is more” philosophy with young tree fertilization.

- **Removing stakes-** If you have staked trees on your property, it is important to remove support staking and ties after the first year of growth or after one growing season. Therefore, most of the stakes on trees in Phases 1, 2, and parts of 3 should have already been removed. More detailed information about staking can be found in the LTC August (1) 2021 Newsletter: <https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/LTC+Newsletters/August+2021+Number+1.pdf>.
- **Pruning-** Mirehaven ARC Guidelines stipulate that “no plant (or tree) can overhang on sidewalk or street or block views.” Therefore, Streetscape trees should be pruned accordingly.

Pruning is the best preventive maintenance for young trees and is critical to developing the shape and structure of the tree. This is often called “structural pruning.” Pruning of newly

planted trees should be limited to removing dead or broken branches. All other pruning should wait until the second or third year after planting to allow the tree to recover from transplant stress.

The leader, which is the vertical stem at the top of the trunk, should never be pruned. Dead or damaged branches, inward-growing branches, potentially crossing branches, and branches with narrow V-shaped crotches should be pruned to eliminate potential problems, but pruning should not interfere with the natural shape of the tree. It is important to have no more than two branches at the same distance from the ground. Branches should be spaced vertically up the trunk in a radial pattern so that so no branch is directly above another branch.

As the trees grow, homeowners may opt to contract with a licensed and insured professional arborist to assist with tree health care and pruning.

More detailed information on pruning, along with some excellent references were covered in the LTC March (3) 2021 Newsletter:

<https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/LTC+Newsletters/March+2021+Three.pdf>.

2. Time to Turn on Your Irrigation System

March is the time to turn your drip irrigation system back on after its winter hiatus. In addition to the information cited in the previous section on watering for trees, the LTC March (1) 2021 Newsletter had a very good discussion about how to set up your irrigation controller by Richard Perce, Irrigation Efficiency Specialist with the

Water Resources Division for the ABC Water Authority. His article can be found at: <https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+Association+Digital+Assets/LTC+Newsletters/March+2021+One.pdf>. When referring to the article, note that most Mirehaven residents have a Rainbird ESP-TM2 irrigation controller installed by the contractor.

Checklist for your drip irrigation system:
(This assumes your system was turned OFF for the winter)

- ✓ Check and clean the metal screen filter found in the front yard irrigation box.
- ✓ Turn the manual valve to the ON position (parallel with pipe). The valve is perpendicular with the pipe when it is in the OFF position.
- ✓ Set your irrigation controller to ON for ~15-20 minute cycle—this will give you time to time to check the irrigation system for leaks. Each drip emitter nozzle should be examined to see if it works—the harsh sunlight of our New Mexico climate is hard on plastic, so many of the nozzles may be cracked and leak. Nozzles may also be clogged by sand or visible white mineral deposits. Affected nozzles need to be cleaned or replaced.
- ✓ Set the irrigation controller for watering times and durations (Figure 2).

If you prefer to watch videos for information, a series of videos on water conversation on KRQE can be found at:

<https://www.505outside.com/video-test-page/>.

SPRING WATERING RECOMMENDATIONS MARCH - MAY FOR GREATER ALBUQUERQUE AREA		
Plant Type	How Often?	How Deep?
TREES	1-2 TIMES PER MONTH	24" INCHES
SHRUBS	1-2 TIMES PER WEEK	18" INCHES
FLOWERING PLANTS	1-3 TIMES PER WEEK	12" INCHES
DESERT ACCENTS	1 TIME PER MONTH	12" INCHES
GROUNDCOVER	1-2 TIMES PER MONTH	6" INCHES
GRASS: TURF	1-2 TIMES PER WEEK	6" INCHES
GRASS: ORNAMENTAL	1 TIME PER WEEK	12" INCHES
VINES	1-2 TIMES PER MONTH	18" INCHES

● MONTHLY
● WEEKLY

Figure 2. Spring watering recommendations. From the 505Outside website: https://www.505outside.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MBTS-all4_Final_OL_for-PRINT_7_5-x-6.pdf

3. Prune Ornamental Grasses

Ornamental grasses should be pruned before new shoots begin to grow, which is late February or March in Albuquerque. Starting at the bottom of the plant, gather the leaves into tight “bundle”—a short rope, string, or bungee cord can secure the leaves in the bundle and can make it easier to see what you are doing. Using a sharp, clean garden shear or pruner, start cutting off the tops—be careful not to cut too close to the ground, since that could damage the growing point. Most ornamental grasses should be cut back to ~ 6 inches from the ground to create a rounded mound. If you are uncertain how to do this, walk around the common areas of Mirehaven and observe the excellent pruning of grasses done by Green Summit, our new landscape contractor (Figure 3). If the mounds still look a bit messy, you can reach into the mound to remove any loose, dead, or matted material.



Figure 3. Ornamental grasses after pruning this spring. Photo by D. W. Dingman

4. Continue to Prune Summer-Flowering Shrubs

Most shrubs benefit from light to moderate pruning every year or every few years, once they’ve become established after transplanting. However, no more than 1/3rd (~30%) of the branches should be cut in a single season.

- Summer-flowering shrubs should be pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth starts since their flowers are borne on wood produced that same year. Examples include chamisa, Apache plume, blue mist spirea, Russian sage, and butterfly bush.
 - This list does NOT include summer-flowering roses! Hold off pruning roses until the danger of frost is over. Based on a ~30 year average, there is a 10% chance of 32°F (=frost) on 3 May in Albuquerque.
- Shrubs without flowers or fruit should be pruned when they are dormant, typically in late winter or spring and before growth has begun.

More detailed information and helpful references on pruning can be found at: <https://www.delwebbmirehaven.com/Assets/The+Estates+at+Mirehaven+Community+A>

[ssociation+Digital+Assets/LTC+Newsletters/March+2021+Three.pdf](#)



“TreeBates” from 505Outside (ABC Water Utility Authority)

If you decide to plant a tree in your garden this spring, the Water Authority will give you a 25% rebate off the purchase and installation of eligible trees, up to a maximum of \$100 per year for residential customers (<https://www.505outside.com/residential-treebates/>).

A list of trees that they find do well in our high desert environment can be found on their website: https://www.505outside.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Treebate_Poster_print2.pdf. However, although many of their recommended trees are in the approved list of trees in our Mirehaven ARC Design Guidelines, please double check before you purchase a tree for your yard.

Educational Opportunities

505Outside: Weather the Drought Water Smart Class Registration

The Albuquerque Bernalillo Water Authority is holding free online/virtual “WaterSmart” classes again this winter and spring. Qualifying participants who complete the class will receive a \$20 rebate on their water bill and learn about the three steps to a successful desert-friendly landscape in our area. Only one rebate per account. As follows are dates for the classes:

- 9 March 2022, 12:00pm-1:00pm

- 16 March 2022, 12:00pm-1:00pm
- 6 April 2022, 12:00pm-1:00pm
- 13 April 2022, 12:00pm-1:00pm
- 11 May 2022, 12:00pm-1:00pm
- 25 May 2022, 12:00pm-1:00pm

To sign up and reserve a spot go to: <https://form.jotform.com/210385925727159>

Xeric Garden Club of Albuquerque

The following upcoming presentations are sponsored by this garden club:

Saturday, March 12, 2022, 9am: Members’ meeting; 10am Presentation

Gail Haggard, Present & Future Changes to Home Gardens

Changing gardens and mindsets with the drought, and offering pollinators food for their caterpillar and flying forms. “I’ve worked at Plants of the Southwest since 1976. I love children even when they get older. We can get through this drought and pandemic together if we don’t succumb to marketing and social media because it’s joyful to clothe bare earth, and learn from insects and animals and plants.” Albuquerque Garden Center, 10120 Lomas Boulevard NE. Free.

Ready, Set, Grow Series is presented by the New Mexico State Cooperative Extension Service. It is a FREE webinar series offered on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 3:00 pm. Once presented, they are also available through video recordings. <https://desertblooms.nmsu.edu/ready-set-grow.html>

- Mar 16, 2022 – “Spring Veggie Gardening” with John Garlisch, Bernalillo County Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent (<https://nmsu.zoom.us/j/925727159>)
- Apr 20, 2022 – “Home Drip Irrigation Systems” with Tom Dominguez, Santa Fe County Cooperative Extension

- May 18, 2022 – “Soil Issues in New Mexico” with Gabriella Coughlin, Agronomist/Agroecologist for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District
- June 15, 2022 – “Keep It Cool: Shading Your Veggies” with Dr. Stephanie Walker, NMSU Extension Vegetable Specialist

Do you have comments or questions about landscaping in common areas of our community? We would also be happy to hear your ideas for helping the LTC improve educational programs and communication within the community.

The Landscaping and Trails Committee has a new, direct email:

dwm landscapetrails@gmail.com

