THE BUCKET WATERING METHOD FOR TREES

Watering guidelines for newly planted trees
From May to August, for the first 2 to 3 years, every tree needs 30 gallons of water every week. From September to mid-October, each tree requires 30 gallons of water every 2 weeks.

Why the bucket method?

✓ conserves water
✓ efficient for trees that are within reach of a garden hose or not within reach
✓ no cost to the school! Reuses your school’s 5 gallon buckets (from floor cleaners, polishes, etc.)
✓ students can adopt this practice as part of your school’s tree stewardship program
✓ the system is simple, fun for students, and can be easily taken on by clubs or classes
✓ offers a teachable moment/lesson in water conservation and tree stewardship

Materials

Ask your caretaker/custodial staff to save 5-gallon empty containers from cleaning products. Be sure to clean them thoroughly before you use them. You will need at least one 5-gallon pail per tree. Ask your caretaker or a parent volunteer to drill two 1/4” holes in the bottom of the pails to allow slow flow when watering.

Method (weekly May-August, every 2 weeks Sept to mid-Oct)

For a grove of 7 trees, start with 7 buckets.
1. Place 1 bucket at the dripline of each tree (see figure 1).
2. Fill each bucket with water, using a regular garden hose or by filling buckets without holes and carrying them to the watering buckets that have holes placed at the dripline.
3. Water will leak out the bottom as the pail is filling up. On average it takes 7 minutes to fill a bucket to the top with a hose. This equals 10-11 gallons of water that percolates slowly into the soil. If you only have buckets to transport water, be sure to fill each watering bucket 2 times.
4. Continue to fill all the buckets one at a time until each bucket has been filled once.

FIGURE 1
THE BUCKET WATERING METHOD FOR TREES

Method (con’t)
5. When you have finished filling the last bucket, return to the first tree and move the first bucket one third of the way around the same tree and fill it up again (see figure 1). Note: You will fill each tree’s bucket 3 times in all so that the tree will receive approximately 30 gallons of water.*
6. Repeat step 5 with the other buckets.

*An alternate method
If possible start with 14 buckets. Place 2 buckets on opposite sides of each tree. Fill each bucket. When you have finished filling the last bucket, return to the first tree and move both buckets one quarter of the way around the tree and fill with water again. As you move through the cycle you will fill each of the buckets twice.

7. Repeat the process for a third time, moving the pails another one third of the way around the tree and filling them for the third and last time. Note: If water starts to run all over the ground rather than sinking in, you know the soil is saturated and you are done.

8. Do this weekly from May-August and every 2 weeks September to mid-October.

A note about tree watering guidelines
Ideally, the trees should be watered through the summer; however, if some weeks are missed, make sure the weekly watering is accomplished when the students come back to school in September and continue this practice through to mid-October instead of dropping down to every 2 weeks. This will ensure that the trees have enough water going into the harsh winter months.