

BIRCH TREE CARE

Birch tree owners should be on the lookout for signs of birch dieback. Dead, sparsely leaved, or wilting upper branches are indicators. Several factors including location, exposure, age, insufficient water and lack of nutrients contribute to birch dieback and mortality. Often, the ultimate death of unhealthy trees is the result of attack by the bronze birch borer.

Several approaches should be taken to ensure healthy birch trees. Prior to planting, select a protected location away from pedestrian and/or vehicular traffic (where possible). Birches grow best in cool, moist, shaded locations. Regardless of location, regular watering is essential. The soil particularly around the tree's drip line (the outer extent of the branches), should be kept moist to a depth of at least 30 cm. This can be accomplished either by surface watering or with commercial root feeding devices.

Fertilization every 5 to 7 years can also maintain tree health. Using a 5 cm auger attachment, drill holes in the turf to a depth of 45 cm at 60 cm centers in concentric circles around the tree. Begin at 90 cm from the tree and continue outward from the tree at 60 cm intervals to approximately 90 cm beyond the drip line. Into each of these holes place approximately one tablespoon (30 grams) of 20-20-20 fertilizer. Water well and replace the turf plugs. Other methods and fertilizers are suitable, but the above is among the best and will give the desired result. Application may be in spring or fall. Slow-release fertilizer should be used for fall application.

Chemical control of the bronze birch borer is not totally effective; however, malathion or lindane sprays applied when adults are feeding (early June) may help reduce populations.

Following all of the above suggestion will not guarantee the life of any tree, especially old or infested trees, but properly implemented, most birch trees will stand a better chance of survival.

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