

Treeways

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How fast will my tree grow?

A tree grows as fast as its genetic potential and environmental conditions allow. It would not be too surprising for an American elm, cottonwood, or willow to put on 8' or more new growth when young with excellent environmental conditions. More typically, hardwood trees average perhaps 1-3' of growth per year and evergreens about 1'. Even oaks can put on 2' of growth in a year if conditions are right. With good soil and favorable weather conditions trees will grow more, while with poor soil or during unfavorable weather conditions, such as drought, trees will grow slower. That is why tree ring data can be used to document climate conditions from the past.

You can speed up tree growth with fertilizer, but I do not recommend that. Trees can be very long-lived creatures and it is far more important to grow healthy than it is to grow fast. Just a word about "tree time". Human infants and toddlers can envision time perhaps till the next meal. Teenagers may be able to look forward till the end of the school day or to the next weekend. Adults typically look out to the end of the month or maybe to the end of the year. Trees are strictly long-term. They live in "tree time"! A day in the life of a tree is insignificant when that tree lives to be several hundred years old. Even more so when the tree lives to be 1000's of years old. Grow well, not fast, is a tree's healthy reality.

A surprising fact is that if you plant a 2' tall tree and an 8" diameter tree (that might be 15' tall) of the same variety on the same day near each other with similar planting and growing conditions, the 2' tall tree will almost certainly catch and pass the larger tree within 5-7 years. Also, the 2' tall tree will likely grow healthier and live longer. If you want to learn how and why this happens come to the Sunfish Lake Arbor Day Event and talk to your City Forester or just give him a call.

Rather than trying to make a tree grow fast, work to create an excellent place for the tree to grow. Most city tree problems are caused by human's lack of care, misguided care, or excessive care. A tree will grow well if it is planted correctly in soil appropriate for that species; if it is mulched to prevent lawn mower and weed whip attacks and reduce lawn and weed competition; if it gets supplemental water when drought conditions occur and no extra watering during wet periods; sunshine for some and shady conditions for others; and protection, as needed, from rabbits, voles, and deer.

A tree knows how to grow and it knows what it needs to grow well. If we, as humans, want to help trees grow as fast and healthy as possible all we need to do is plant the tree correctly, in reasonably good soil, with adequate moisture and not too much, and keep a ring of shredded wood mulch around but not against the trunk. Also, it doesn't hurt to keep the dog chains, lawn mowers, weed whips, lawn herbicides, cars and little boys with baseball bats away from your tree. Trees know what they need to thrive and if we will just get out of their way, they will thrive. Then your tree has the potential to reach its greatest possible size, beauty and long life ...