



Dear Magnolia Grandiflora,

My yard has never looked better this year despite the cold snap we had in early spring. As an eager gardener with a moderately green thumb, I know when to fertilize my lawn and flower beds. But, I am curious about the trees we planted three years ago. Should we fertilize and prune? If so, when should this happen?

Sappily,  
Tree Lover on Tyne

Dear Tree Lover,

Taking care of your trees will pay you many dividends of shade and fall color for years to come. Fall marks the start of the dormancy period for trees and shrubs, as they begin to conserve energy to survive winter. This is exactly when you need to focus on their care by fertilizing established trees and planting new ones. Did you know that Belle Meade is home to many great champion trees of massive size? These beauties have grown so big, because they are well tended or grow in an area that has been undisturbed for hundreds of years. How many large trees can you spot in the woodlands of Percy and Edwin Warner Parks compared to the street where you live? These grand dames are the stars of the fall color show with fiery red and orange leaves and acorns tumbling down in our neighborhoods. To help ensure Belle Meade's beautiful tree canopy remains strong and vibrant, you will need to make sure your trees have the proper nutrients and pruning.

First, let's talk about fertilizer. What is the bane of many a tidy lawn is actually food for trees: leaves. Leaf, twig, and bark debris removal from around the base of a tree depletes it of necessary nutrients otherwise found in woodland settings. Additionally, a nice, lush grassy lawn competes with the trees for food. Let's face it - we would all like to win a 'Yard of the Month' contest with neat-as-pin landscapes. So, if you want to rake your leaves or your tree is not looking vibrant or like its old self, now is the best time to consider fertilizer. Newly-planted trees have a different set of care guidelines which does not include fertilizing their first year. Choosing the right fertilizer depends on the species of tree and many other factors. Consult with your locally-owned garden supply center or click this link to find out more from the UT Ag Extension office.

[Fertilizing Landscape Trees](#)

Second, you need pruning patience. Hold onto your loppers and pruners until late winter. Remember the adage about George Washington cutting down the cherry tree? This is an easy way to remember that it's best to prune your trees and shrubs in February around President's Day. Pruning allows for strong, healthy growth by removing dead limbs and branches and any diseased areas. Never, ever, ever, top a tree. If you are concerned about any structural issues of your tree and where to prune, consult with a board-certified arborist who has extensive training on the health and diseases of trees. If you are considering pruning yourself, click this link to learn more from the UT Ag Extension office.

[Best Management Practices for Pruning Landscape Trees, Shrubs and Ground Covers](#)

Happy tree hugging!  
Magnolia Grandiflora