

# Staking Trees: To Stake or Not to Stake

While staking can help some newly planted trees, it is often overused. Unnecessary staking can weaken trunks, limit root development, and even cause damage if done incorrectly. Allowing a young tree some natural movement helps it develop strength, taper, and a healthy root system.

## When Staking Is Needed

Staking is beneficial for trees that:

- Have a dense crown but a small root ball.
- Are exposed to stiff winds that cause the root ball to shift.
- Need protection from mechanical damage
- Are sensitive to soil compaction, where stakes or mulch can signal “don’t tread here.”

**Tip:** Check if a tree’s roots are moving by gently pushing the trunk and observing soil movement at the base. If the root ball shifts, staking may be necessary.

## Staking Best Practices

### 1. Allow Movement:

- The top of the tree should move freely.
- Lower trunk should have some flexibility to develop strength.

### 2. Use Proper Materials:

- Ties: Elastic inner tubes, nylon stockings, or elastic webbing in a figure-eight loop to prevent abrasion.
- Stakes: Metal rebar, wooden posts, fiberglass posts, or metal pipes. Stakes should be strong but not shade the trunk.

### 3. Tie Placement:

- One tie per stake is usually sufficient.
- Do not tie higher than two-thirds up the trunk.

### 4. Number of Stakes:

- Small trees (<2 in trunk diameter): 1 stake.

- Larger trees (up to 4 in diameter): 2–3 stakes, each tied separately.

### **Duration of Staking**

- Small trees: remove stakes after 1 year.
- Larger trees: may require stakes up to 2 years.
- Test by moving the trunk—if the root ball doesn't move, the stakes can come out.
- Exceptions: Certain dwarf fruit trees may require permanent staking.

**Tip:** Never forget to remove stakes—prolonged staking can delay development and risk girdling the trunk.

### **Quick Checklist for Staking**

- Assess if the tree truly needs a stake (dense crown, small roots, wind exposure).
- Use elastic ties in a figure-eight loop.
- Position stakes to allow movement, not shade.
- Limit ties to one per stake.
- Use appropriate number of stakes based on trunk size.
- Inspect regularly for rubbing, tight ties, or root ball movement.
- **Remove stakes as soon as the tree is stable.**

**Takeaway:** Staking is a tool, not a default practice. Done carefully and temporarily, it protects the tree and encourages healthy growth. Over-staking, however, can weaken both trunk and roots, so always assess the tree's actual needs.