



WISCONSIN FOOD FORESTS

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Caring for Your Food Forest

Watering

After your food forest is planted, you will need to water if it doesn't rain at least an inch in the first week. Your plants need to be watered once every week to 10 days, or when the soil feels dry on your fingertip when you insert it into the soil about 1.5 inches down/up to your second knuckle. Trees need about 3 to 4 gallons per watering, whereas other plants need less. It is best to water low and slow. Water until you see a sheen of liquid on the soil surface that stays for at least three seconds before soaking in. This means that the soil is saturated, and you should stop watering. **Water only when necessary. Do not water every day. Too much water or lack of water are the main reasons why plants fail to thrive.** Water more frequently (twice per week) during hot and dry weather. In the fall, keep watering until the ground freezes. The second and third year you can stop watering unless there is a drought (more than 3 weeks of no rain).

Mulching: Mulch with wood chips 4 inches deep around the plants and sparingly one foot out from the trunk or stems.

Tart Cherry: These trees require pruning. There are many ways to prune fruit trees. Consider attending a hands-on pruning workshop at Troy Gardens or Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison or getting a book about pruning. In Wisconsin, the best time to prune cherries is in March, while the plants are still dormant. It is also important to shape your trees starting next year to promote good branch structure. For example, using clothespins to bend branches down to a 30- or 45-degree angle for better fruit production. Emily can prune for you or show you how to do this. Your tree should be pruned every year and re-mulched with wood chips. Add a shovelful of compost annually in spring. The fence can be removed after 4 years.

Currants and Gooseberries: Add a couple handfuls of compost annually in early spring. Your shrubs should be renewal pruned in the spring by cutting off 1/3 of the oldest stems at ground level starting when they are 3 years old. The fences can be removed eventually unless you have heavy rabbit pressure.

Aronia, Juneberry, Hazelnuts, and Honeyberries: Light pruning, lightly fertilize with two or three handfuls of compost to the top of the soil during planting and annually thereafter, check the fences before winter. The fences can be removed eventually unless you have heavy rabbit pressure. Mulch with wood chips.

You do not need to do anything for your Redbud, Nannyberry, or Wild Rose except make sure the fences are secure before winter, trim off dead branches in the spring, and re-mulch with wood chips as needed.