

Tips for Coastal Redwood Tree Care

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The care of coastal redwoods is mostly about water, assuming the soil is normal garden soil and drainage is good. They need plenty of fresh—not salty—water passing through the root zone. And in their foggy coastal native habitat they absorb a significant amount of it through their foliage.

A mature coastal redwood, in one day, can absorb 90 gallons of water from the soil and 60 gallons from fog. And in the first hour after the specialized, thready “axial” leaves become wet with fog a redwood can absorb 14 gallons of water. (Look up the work of Alana Chin at UC Davis!).

There is no simple and exact rule for irrigating redwoods, but the renowned arborist, Barrie Coate said redwoods can use 20 gallons of water per inch of trunk diameter per month. So, a newly planted 5-gallon tree with a one-inch caliper trunk probably needs about twenty gallons per month, but applied directly on the root ball in doses of about 5 gallons per week. And using that formula, a 40-inch trunk diameter redwood in the landscape needs about 800 gallons per month. But keep in mind, the roots grow wide, absorbing water wherever they find it. It might be in a lawn, an irrigated shrub or ground cover bed, a drainage pipe, the cool moist area under a sidewalk, a foundation, or a septic leach field.

This raises the subject of one of the saddest things I have to do in my work as a consulting arborist—and this happens frequently—is to recommend removal of redwood trees where they were planted too close to homes, sidewalks and other infrastructure.

I have heard tell of coastal redwood roots being found over 100 feet away from the nearest redwood. And I’ve seen how roots trapped in a nursery container will grow where they can, circling around and eventually choking the tree and causing it to be structurally unstable.

With all of that in mind, I’ll offer these few tips on growing coastal redwoods in a landscape:

- Plant them at least 50-feet away from buildings and other infrastructure.
- Do not buy pot-bound nursery stock.
- When planting, shave off any matted and circling roots.
- Dig the planting hole shallow and wide so the tree will not settle below the natural grade.
- Irrigate directly onto the root ball and lightly onto the surrounding soil until the tree is firmly rooted. Then shift irrigation to a broader root zone.
- After soaking the root zone, allow for complete drainage and partial drying, then repeat.

In short, for the tallest-growing trees on Earth, give them plenty of space and water!

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