

Automatic Watering Systems

by Randy Bennett

I've been using an automatic watering system with my trees for many years. At times, because of a full schedule, it is difficult to water everyday by hand. And when leaving town for the weekend or going on vacation, an automatic watering system is absolutely essential. Long ago, I made mistakes like asking the next-door neighbor to water my trees, as well as asking the kid down the street, anxious to make a few bucks, to "tree sit" for me. I always returned to one disaster or another.



When I first installed my automatic watering system, I thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread and at times it was. The down-side to having an automatic watering system was that I relied on it all the time, and with equally disastrous results. What I began to notice was an increasing problem with fungal diseases. At first I didn't pay any attention to it and just assumed it was a natural occurrence, and I sprayed with fungicide and sprayed and sprayed and sprayed! Then, for a couple of years straight; I had a serious fungal problem and wound up losing several trees. Finally, it dawned on me that I was the one causing the problem with my constant overhead watering (2 to 3 times a day in the heat of summer). The only difference between me and my neighbor caring for my trees was that she killed them all at once and I killed them slowly.

Now please understand, I am not knocking automatic watering systems. On the contrary, I couldn't have a collection without one. What I am saying is, don't rely on one exclusively. Watering by hand provides you with the opportunity of daily inspecting your trees for problems. It allows you to limit overhead watering which contributes to fungal problems. It allows you to skip trees whose soil is still damp from watering the day before. You know that over-watering is almost certain death to most trees.

So, use that automatic watering system – just don't use it all the time.