

# Planting Tips for Trees

## Introduction

Trees are the most significant plants in the landscape. They help create spatial enclosure that forms the basic framework upon which all other landscape design elements build. Trees provide beauty, shade, screening, habitats for wildlife, and they soften architectural features of buildings. High quality trees increase the value and buyer appeal of the home property. Trees are long lived features of the landscape and their selection, placement and planting are very important.

## Tree Selection Tips:

1. The first step in successful tree planting is selecting an appropriate tree. Of special importance is how big your tree will get when mature. Mature trees reach heights of 15 ft. to more than 100 ft. Some trees spread out when mature and others grow upright and narrow. A little study of tree size and shape before you buy may save you the discomfort of removing the tree in the future because it has grown too big.
2. Another important aspect of tree selection is its proposed use in the landscape. Trees provide shade, block unsightly views, and provide interest with their flowers, fruit, foliage, and attractive bark. Also important is a tree's freedom from, or susceptibility to, various insects and diseases. A good project before selecting a specific tree is to make a list of characteristics you desire in your new tree. Height, spread, evergreen or deciduous, attractive flowers or fruit, low water requirements, and soil adaptability are some of the characteristics to list before you go tree shopping. For a guide to tree selection, order Extension Bulletin #183, *Trees in the Landscape*.
3. After you decide on the type of tree, you can go nursery shopping. Always buy trees from a reliable nursery. While there is no official rating of nurseries and garden centers, there are several things that can be used to evaluate their quality. A quality nursery will usually be clean, well designed, and provide easy access to the plants. They will have a large stock of trees, and be willing to answer all of your questions. The trees

should be clearly labeled and free from any damage to the trunk, branches, and foliage. A reliable nursery will provide some type of guarantee period, which should extend at least through one summer season.

## Bare Rooted Plants

Bare-rooted plants have had the soil washed or shaken from their roots after digging. Nearly all are deciduous trees or shrubs that are dormant. Most mail order plants are of this class because plants in soil are too heavy to ship economically.

Bare root plants are planted while dormant. Never let the roots dry out. This is perhaps the single most important reason for failure in planting bare-rooted plants. Keep roots in water or wrapped in plastic or wet paper until you are ready to plant. Bare-rooted plants may need root-pruning at planting time to repair damaged roots as well as stem-pruning to correct broken stems.

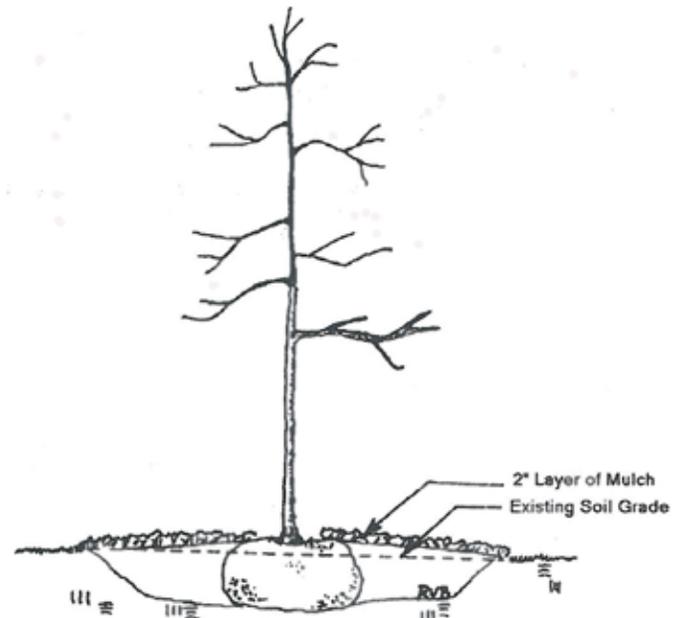
## When to Plant Trees:

Both balled-and-burlapped (B&B) and container grown trees can be planted any time the soil isn't frozen. Summer planting, when the trees are in full leaf, can be stressful and should be avoided if possible. There are a few types of trees that seem to establish better if planted in the spring rather than the fall, including oaks, pines, dogwoods, American holly, willows, and black gum.

## Planting Procedure:

1. The planting hole for a tree should be no deeper than the depth of the rootball and at least three to five times as wide. The sides of the planting hole should slope outwards. Do not add compost or peat moss directly into a small planting hole. These materials may hold excessive moisture and drown the young roots. If the soil has a very high percentage of clay or sand, mix in compost across the eventual root zone of the planted trees.

2. When space allows, plant trees in groups. Prepare the soil in a large, bed arrangement, and plant several trees within the bed. This not only allows the trees to have a greater root development area, but also creates a natural setting that is attractive and makes it possible to have more trees in your yard.
3. Don't mix fertilizer into the planting hole or into the soil to be backfilled into the planting hole. Instead, apply a general garden fertilizer, such as 10-5-5 or 10-6-4, at the rate of two pounds of fertilizer per each 100 square feet on the surface of the planting area soil after the tree has been planted.
4. Place the tree in the planting hole with the top of the root ball level with or slightly above the existing soil line. When planting into heavy clay soils, place the tree with ten percent of the root ball above the existing soil line. Grade the soil out gradually from the root ball to the edges of the prepared planting area.
5. Once the tree has been placed in the planting hole and set to the desired orientation, remove any cords around the root ball and cut the burlap loose. The burlap can be completely removed or cut away at least half way down the root ball. If the tree's root ball was enclosed in a wire basket, cut off and remove, or fold down the top half of the basket before backfilling the hole. No burlap or basket should be visible above the soil once the planting hole has been filled.



4. Research has shown that an effective way to maximize growth of trees is by surrounding it with a large mulched area instead of grass. This will reduce competition for nutrients and moisture between young trees and grass. Mulch new trees out as far as the spread of the branches. Large trees also benefit from a mulched area at least 15 feet beyond the trunk or as far as the spread of the branches. This may not be practical unless the trees are in a mass planting. The mulch layer should not exceed two inches in depth.
5. Keep newly planted trees watered. Newly planted trees should be watered when the soil below the mulch and in the root ball feels dry. Be careful not to overwater. Many people have inadvertently drowned newly planted trees by watering them too often.

#### Care After Planting:

1. Do not stake a newly planted tree. Research has shown that the natural movement of the trunk by the wind actually stimulates root growth and increases trunk size more quickly than trees held firm by staking. If for some reason the tree does not seem sturdy after planting, or if the site is very windy, staking may be needed for the first season. Allow enough slack in the supporting wires for some trunk movement. Use pieces of rubber hose over the wire to prevent bark damage.
2. It is not necessary to prune an ornamental tree before, or immediately after planting, unless the pruning consists of removing broken or damaged branches. It is not necessary to "balance" top growth with roots.
3. There is disagreement among horticulturist as to whether wrapping the trunks of newly planted trees with burlap or special paper is necessary. Some believe wrapping the trunk will lessen the chances of bark splitting from exposure to direct sun, a problem known as sunscald. Since most trees affected by sun scald are smooth barked trees, such as red maple, willow oak and linden, it is recommended to wrap the bark of these trees at planting, but promptly remove the wrap after one year.

#### Stay Alert to Problems:

Check on your newly planted trees every week. Check the soil for adequate moisture and check the foliage and branches for problems. If you discover insects feeding on the tree, or what appears to be a disease, contact the Maryland Home and Garden Information Center or your local Extension Office, for assistance in identifying and controlling the problem.

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