

PLANTING TIPS

FOR A HEALTHY START

Watering the Tree First

When planting a tree that has been in the nursery for any period of time, it is very important to ensure that your tree has an abundance of water before, during and after planting. This may be more difficult in the summer. A root-bound or dry tree will not absorb water quickly. Fill the planting hole with water with the tree inside before back-filling with soil. In the fall or winter it may not be as important if the ground is saturated or damp.

Planting the Tree

The planting hole should always be considerably wider than the roots or root ball; two times wider is best. The sides should slope gradually, making the hole saucer-shaped or bowl-shaped.

Planting a tree too deep can kill it, so it is important not to dig the planting hole any deeper than is necessary for covering the root ball. For stability, and to prevent settling after planting, the root ball needs to rest on undisturbed soil excavated to a depth to ensure that the tree is replanted at the same depth or one inch higher than it was grown in the nursery.

The root collar is the lowest few inches of the trunk just above its juncture with the roots. This is typified by a flaring of the trunk at or just above the ground level. It is suggested that the root collar is exposed and the top of the root ball is at grade.

Next, add a 5 gallon bucket of water to the hole or fill the hole using a hose. You can wait for the water to drain, or if you know that your soil is well draining soil, put the tree in the hole with the water still there. Back-fill the soil with a shovel in an up and down motion around the edges. This will help to eliminate the air pockets and to anchor the tree. The water in the hole is giving the tree the moisture that it needs and also helping to eliminate air pockets from the soil that can cause the roots to dry out and die.

The tree you purchased is either grown in a pot or a grow bag, or in the field and then Balled and Burlapped (B&B). Follow the instructions below to ensure that your tree is planted correctly.

- **Trees in Grow Bags**

If the tree is in a fabric grow bag, this material does not biodegrade. Remove the bag to expose the root tips.

- **Trees Balled & Burlapped (B&B)**

B&B trees are field dug, and the soil ball is placed in a treated fiber burlap which is biodegradable and then tied securely to the base of the tree with twine. Oftentimes root balls of larger trees are placed in both burlap and a wire basket. A secure root ball helps to main the integrity of the tree root system and is critical to tree survival.

If the tree is in burlap, do not remove the burlap from the root ball. Place the tree in the planting hole with burlap and/or wire basket intact. Secure the tree into its final planting position by back-filling enough soil to stabilize the root ball and tree in place – generally half way up the root ball side. Now remove the twine and pull the burlap back from around the tree trunk. If applicable open the wire basket up and fold outwards. (The top half of the wire basket can be cut away, down to the back-filled soil line.) Feel free to remove loose burlap with scissors. Finish planting the tree by back-filling the remaining soil in the planting hole. Be sure no burlap is left exposed to the air as it can wick moisture from the root zone drying out new roots very quickly. At no time should the burlap and/or the wire basket be completely removed before planting.

- Trees in Pots

If the tree is in a pot, slide it out and gently loosen the roots with your fingers. Depending on how long your tree has been in a pot, this may be more difficult. Sometimes it is likely that you may need to lay the tree on its side and use force to get it out. Other times you may need to cut the pot down the side. When the tree is out of the pot, look at the roots. If it is a solid root mass and you cannot loosen with your fingers, the roots will need to be scored with a knife or a shovel. Don't be afraid, when you cut the roots down the side at about a 2 inch depth this forces the roots to start growing outward instead of continuing the circling, which can cause problems with its development.

- Trees in Burlap in Pots

If the tree is in burlap in a pot, it came to us this winter balled in burlap (B&B) and we containerized it in a pot. The tree has not had time to root out in the container, and it's important that the root ball remains intact during transport and planting. Transport the tree standing upright so the soil will not spill out.

When planting, tip the pot toward the planting hole. Carefully remove the planting mix surrounding the balled root mass. Next, find the four corners of the burlap square. Pull the corners together and slide the root ball out. Once inside the planting hole, lay the burlap back towards the bottom of the hole and backfill. The burlap from the root ball will break down in time, but should be away from the sides of the root ball. The potting material will fall away from the balled root mass which is fine, but it's important that the soil the tree was originally grown in remains compact. Completely remove any twine or tying materials.

Fertilizing

When planting in the fall, you can apply a fertilizer higher in potassium for root growth. It is important to give your tree less nitrogen at this time because you do not want new leaf growth during frost. If planting in the spring, a fertilizer slightly higher in nitrogen is good to promote new growth in roots, flowers, leaves and stems. Apply on the top of the soil around drip line or apply during the back-filling process by filling half of the hole with soil, adding the fertilizer and adding the remaining soil. Roots usually stay in the top two feet of the soil because they need oxygen.

Mulching

Studies have shown that wood-chip mulch nearly doubles tree growth in the first few years after planting. A circle of mulch should be placed around every newly planted tree to conserve soil moisture and moderate soil temperatures. The mulch should cover an area at least four times the diameter of the root ball at the time of transplanting and should be 3-4 inches deep, but should stay a few inches away from the trunk.

Staking

If you feel that strong winds may loosen your tree, staking is an option. Try to stake as low as you can on the trunk. This allows the tree to sway with the wind and become strong. The main purpose is to hold the root ball in place. If you stake the tree high on the trunk, it is possible that it will become dependent on the stake. When the time comes to take the stake off, the trunk may be more brittle and break with the wind. The stake or stakes should only remain on for one year. The best form of attachment is called Chain-Lock. It is easy to use and will not damage the trunk of the tree.