

PLANTING GUIDELINES FOR TREES AND SHRUBS

Proper planting helps your tree to get off to a good start and to thrive. Here are some simple steps you can take to get the best results. Most trees and shrubs are available either as balled and burlapped (B&B) or in a container. B&B trees contain a large ball of soil, wrapped in burlap and secured with twine. Sometimes a wire basket surrounds the root ball.

When to Plant

Spring and early fall are the best times to plant trees. Cooler temperatures mean that there is



less stress on the leaves from heat and evaporation of water.

Container plants can be planted in the summer, through extra precautions are necessary and it's not an ideal time. You can also plant trees when they're dormant, in late fall or very early spring.

Assemble Tools

You'll need a good shovel, tarp or wheelbarrow, compost (which you can buy bagged at a nursery), scissors or pruners, tape measure or ruler, organic fertilizer, and a source of water.

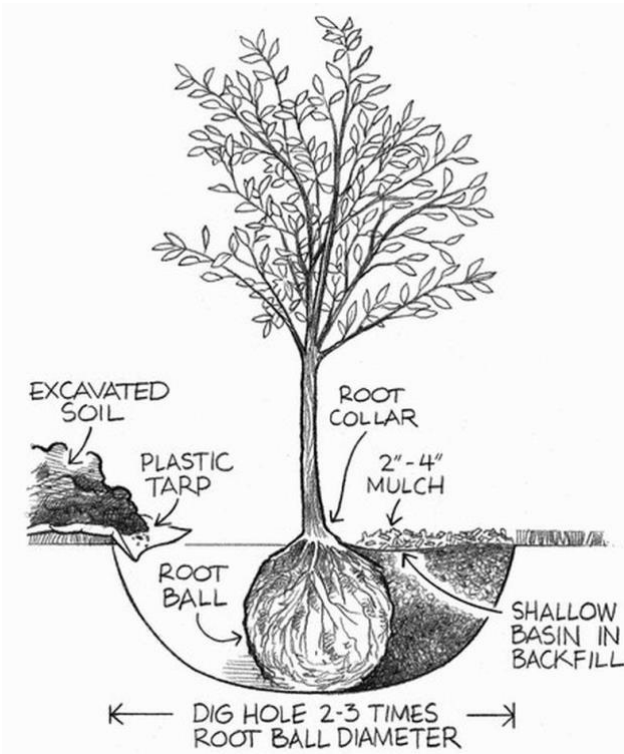
Digging the Hole

Dig a hole that is 2-3 times the diameter of the root mass, but only as deep as the root ball. Measure the depth of the root ball or container soil before digging the hole. The root ball should be sitting on firm, well-drained soil, not a soft cushion that will allow the tree to sink once planted and watered. Water the empty hole and see how well the water drains. If it drains very slowly, you may need to break up the soil in the bottom of the hole and add gravel or sand to the soil.

Save the soil that you have dug out in a wheelbarrow or on a tarp. Generally speaking, you don't need to mix amendments into the soil unless it's too sandy or has too much clay. If they're needed, mix amendments - compost or sand - into that reserved soil before you use it to backfill the hole.

Prepare the Tree to be Planted

If you have a B&B tree, remove the metal cage if there is one. If it is container grown, remove the



tree from the container and examine the roots. Loosen or cut the roots, especially if they are circling the container. This will stimulate root growth. The goal is to make it easier for the roots to spread into the hole.

Position the Tree in the Hole

Set the plant in the hole, ensuring that the flare will not sit below the soil line. The root flare is where the main trunk meets the spreading roots, and it needs to be at or slightly above the final soil line. If the root flare isn't visible, you may need to take away some soil from the top of the root ball or container so the flare is evident. Planting it too low is worse than planting it too high. Use a piece of wood across the hole (maybe the handle of the shovel), near the trunk, to see if the tree is in the proper height. Use soil to make adjustments under the root ball if one side is making the tree lean. Position it so that it's in the middle of the hole and ensure that the trunk is straight. Remove twine and burlap that is near the top of the root ball. Untreated burlap but not plastic burlap will decompose if left on the root ball.

Back Fill the Soil and Water Well

Fill in the hole around the plant with backfill soil. Be sure to place soil around the bottom edges of the root ball, supporting the sides of the root ball.

Press the soil down to eliminate air pockets. Use extra soil to make a well around the root ball so that the water doesn't run away from the root mass. It's important that the roots and surrounding soil are kept moist after planting. Give it a good soaking and plan to water it every few days during the first month, and weekly throughout its first season, until the ground freezes. "Soak, don't sprinkle." The goal is to ensure that the root ball doesn't dry out. You may need to water more frequently if there's a drought.

Mulch

You can help to retain water and avoid weeds by mulching the top surface of the soil with about 2" of organic mulch. Leave a few inches around the tree trunk free of mulch and make sure that the flare isn't covered with mulch – no "volcanoes." Mulch also keeps lawnmowers and weed whackers from damaging the bark.

Fertilizer

You can mix granular organic fertilizer into the planting hole, as well as watering every week with diluted fish emulsion / seaweed fertilizer. Spread compost on the planting circle in subsequent years.

Illustration: Rick Tuma, Tribune Newspapers