

Tree Planting Tips

Purchasing a healthy, vigorous tree is the first step to a successful planting. Choose a tree that has branching and foliage on about 2/3 of its total height. The more branching a tree has the more equally stress from wind is distributed along its trunk. Lower limbs and leaves shade and nourish the trunk resulting in a tree with better taper and trunk strength. Large roots should not be exposed above the soil. This usually indicates severely kinked or circling roots that can eventually girdle (strangle) the tree, weakening it or even killing it in time.

The planting hole should only be as deep as the root ball and twice as wide. A deeper hole will enable the tree to settle too deeply possibly causing crown rot. If the sides and bottom of the hole are glazed (shiny and smooth), roughen them with a shovel so the roots can penetrate into the surrounding soil easily. Prune any dead, broken or twisted roots. Roots matted at the bottom or circling around the root ball should be removed or straightened. Amend the backfill soil with 50% Planting mix or other organic amendment if your soil is clayey or sandy.

If wind, hot sun or aesthetic aspect are not factors, position your tree so that the majority of the branches are facing away from the afternoon sun. This will help the tree produce more foliage on the "barer side". If hot sun is an issue, position the tree so that the bud union (the crook) on a grafted tree is facing away from the afternoon sun (it can burn!). If wind is a factor, position the tree so that the majority of branches face the oncoming wind. Once the position has been determined, backfill the soil 1/2 making sure there is good contact with the roots and water. Fill the hole with the second 1/2 and water again. Mulch around the tree with fine or micro bark to reduce evaporation and subdue germinating weeds.

Staking is the final step. There are 2 methods of staking;

anchor staking and support staking. You will want to ANCHOR stake your tree to hold an otherwise upright tree in place until the roots can grow into the surrounding soil. If trees are not well anchored, frequent irrigations, wind and subsequent trunk movement can break the newly forming roots. This type of staking also protects the trunk from mower or pedestrian damage. Use 2 or 3 2"x2" 4' stakes approximately 15" apart around the tree. This stake size is good for a tree of any dimension. The stakes should protrude about 30" above the ground (11/2' underground). Place one loop or figure 8 between each stake and the tree trunk. Use rubberized or soft ties to prevent chaffing. Ties should be placed near the top of the stake and allow for some movement of the trunk at that level. The ties can usually be removed after the first growing season but leave the stakes to continue to protect the trunk. SUPPORT staking is needed for trees that cannot stand upright on their own or in windy areas. It may be cheaper to only use one stake but the negatives (MANY) dictate that 2 or even 3 stakes be used. The support stakes should be positioned so that an imaginary line between them is at a right angle to the prevalent wind direction. Use stakes that are 2"x2", the length will depend on the height of your tree. You will want 1 1/2' of the stake in the ground. The stake should be no higher than 30" below the tip of the tree. So, a 6' tree would require a 5' stake, a 7" tree needs a 6' stake and so on. Don't use a longer stake than necessary. The higher the support, the more inflexible the trunk and the higher the stress load to the top of the tree (snap!). You will want to place a loop tie at the top of the stake and again half way down the stake. Again, always use rubberized, soft or broad ties. Wire or twine can cut into the tree bark. Check the ties frequently to be sure they are not too tight and cutting into the bark. Remove them as soon as the tree is sturdy enough to stand on it's own, usually one or two seasons.



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