

Sunshine Nursery & Arboretum

Tree Planting Guide

When to Plant

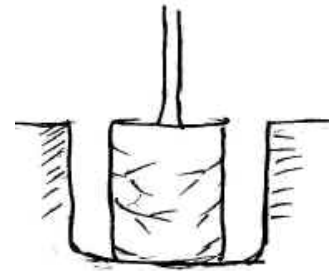
The best time to plant a tree is in the fall through early spring when the tree is under the least environmental stress. However, container grown trees can be planted at any time of year because the root system is not disturbed when you plant. Good watering practices must be followed for success. The warmer the temperatures are when you plant, the more you'll be required to water. When the tree is first planted, the original ball of dirt is the only area from which your tree can get water. Your watering must penetrate that area completely and keep it moist for the tree to establish and survive. So, you will probably need to water your tree every day for the first several months if it is planted in the late spring or summer.

Preparing the Hole

You do not need to add soil amendments to your hole when planting a tree. The roots of your tree will grow out far into your yard, so you should choose a species of tree that will grow well in the soil you have. Dig your hole only as deep as the root ball of your tree. A deeper hole can cause the tree to sink, burying it too deep. The root ball should be even with the surrounding soil when you place it in the hole. It is, however, a good idea to dig the hole wider than the root ball. This loosens the soil around the tree and will promote better initial root growth.

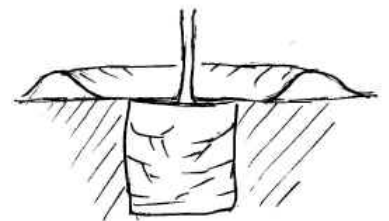
Planting the Tree

Now you are ready to plant your tree. Be gentle with the root ball. You do not want it to break apart, because this will severely damage many of the tree's tiny roots. Before you plant your tree, look at it from several angles to decide how you want it oriented in the hole. Plant the tree trunk straight up and down. If the top of your tree curves in one direction, point the top to the southwest. Our winds will help straighten it as it grows. Handle your tree only by the root ball. Lifting and pulling on the tree trunk can break the roots that will be anchoring your tree.



- If you bought a tree in a container, grab the tree at the base of the trunk, lift it just slightly off the ground (an inch or two) and tap sharply on the rim of the container. The pot should come loose. Then carefully lift up the tree and set it gently in the hole. For large containers, lay the tree on its side and slide it out of the pot.
- If you bought a tree in a "grow bag", the root ball will be in a cloth bag with a plastic bottom, instead of a plastic pot. The grow bag must be removed when you plant your trees, but you must do it carefully and not break apart the root ball. Make sure your hole is wide enough so that you have about six inches of room to work all around the root ball. First, lean the tree over and carefully cut away the plastic at the bottom. Then, set your tree down into the hole. Next, slice down the sides of the grow bag in several places, so that the bag can be removed in pieces--- **with the root ball intact**. Some of the fine roots of the tree will have rooted into the fabric of the bag. If you are having trouble removing the entire bag, it is ok to leave some in the hole, as long as it is sufficiently mutilated and out of the way. You want to make sure that the roots have contact with the soil and that the tree will be able to root out into your soil. The most important thing is that you do not break apart the root ball, so work carefully!
- If you bought a tree in a burlap bag, after the tree is set in the hole and some dirt has been added to the hole, cut loose the tie around the base of the trunk. This tie will not decompose fast enough, and if left on the tree will girdle the trunk and can kill the tree. The burlap can be pulled back from the trunk, but does not have to be removed because it will quickly decompose and will not inhibit root growth. This is only true if it is common burlap---plastic burlap must be removed. The root control "grow bag" is a better growing method and is used exclusively at Sunshine Nursery.

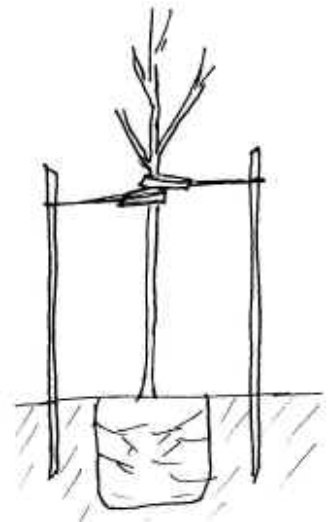
Fill the dirt back in the hole, firmly --- but don't stomp. The soil should just cover the root ball. Make sure there is no twine or anything left around the trunk that could cause girdling. To help with watering your tree, you should build a "dam" around the tree. Build up the dirt several inches high in a circle around the tree, 2 to 3 feet in diameter.



This will hold more water and direct the water into the root ball when you water. Water the tree well when you are finished planting to eliminate air pockets and settle the soil. If you have heavy clay soil, you will need to be more careful when watering. You will have to water enough to ensure that the root ball is wet, but you do not want water to stand around the tree for an extended period.

Caring for Your Newly Planted Tree

- The most important thing that you can do for your new tree is to monitor the water. The second most important thing is to **mulch, mulch, mulch**. Keep the grass back away from the trunk of your tree. Grass saps the available water and competes with your tree. (As well as inviting lawn mowers and weed eaters too close! See the next topic.) Spread the mulch of your choice several inches deep in **at least** a 3 foot circle around the tree (preferably wider) but don't pile mulch up on the trunk of the tree. Mulch cools the soil, retains moisture, and keeps weeds at bay. You can use wood chips, cottonseed hulls, or even dried grass clippings to mulch around your tree.
- **Don't girdle your tree!** Girdling happens when lawn mowers and weed eaters get too close to the trunk and damage the bark of the tree. Chaining dogs to a tree can also cause girdling to happen. Some of the tree's most important cells lie just under the bark. These cells are responsible for transporting water and nutrients up, and food down, the tree. Damaging this layer of cells stops this important flow and will severely damage or kill your tree.
- In Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plains, staking your tree is a necessary evil. Your tree should be staked while it is getting established, usually for the first year or so, not indefinitely. Once it is established and rooted in, it will be able to hold itself up. You also do not want to completely immobilize your tree. Some swaying in the wind will help to strengthen your tree. To stake your tree, you will need two long stakes, two pieces of rubber hose about 12 inches long (cut these from the end of an old watering hose), and two pieces of wire 3-4 feet in length. Drive the stakes into the ground a foot or so away from the trunk of your tree, one on the east and one on the west. Do not drive the stakes into the root ball of your tree. Thread a length of wire through one piece of hose. Wrap the wire and hose once around the trunk of your tree, and secure the wire to one of the stakes. Repeat for the other side. No wire should be touching the trunk of the tree. The rubber hose will help protect your tree trunk. Wide strapping can also be used. Check the stakes periodically to make sure they are not too tight, and that they are not causing a sore on your tree. Remove the stakes after a year or so has passed. It is best to remove them in the summer or fall after the spring storms have passed.
- Water your tree when it is dry. If you plant your tree in the fall or winter, it will not need to be watered as often as if you plant it in the spring or summer. Until your tree roots out into your soil, it can only reach the water that is in its original root ball. The potting mix that your container tree is planted in is lighter weight than your soil and will dry out faster. In fact, if the potting mix gets really dry, it will start to repel water, making it very hard to water your tree. Water your tree regularly so that this does not happen. The summers in western Oklahoma are harsh. For the most part, **rain does not count** because it doesn't usually penetrate deep enough. A tree newly planted in the summer should be watered **every day** with ten to fifteen gallons of water. Making a dam around your tree helps keep the water where it needs to go. As your tree gets older and can reach farther, it will need to be watered less often. Your older tree will still need to be watered during the heat of summer. It is best to water them slowly so the water can soak deeply into the top 12-18 inches of soil. Turn the water hose on low, lay it near the trunk of the tree, and let it run for an hour. If you use a sprinkler, set a coffee can in the area to see how long it must run to deliver an inch of water.
- Prune your tree during the first few years to help maintain a healthy tree structure. When you prune, it is very important to do it correctly. See our pruning guide for more information.



Other information, including our pruning guide is available online at www.SunshineNursery.com.