

Planting a Tree

Planting Balled and Burlapped Trees:

Balled and burlapped (B & B) trees, although best planted as soon as possible, can be stored for some time after purchase as long as the ball is kept moist and the tree stored in a shady area. *B & B trees should always be lifted by the ball, never by the trunk.* The burlap surrounding the ball of earth and roots should either be cut away completely (mandatory, in the case of synthetic or plastic burlap) or at least pulled back from the top third of the ball (in the case of natural burlap). Any string or twine should also be removed. Backfill soil (combinations of peat moss, composted manure, topsoil, etc.) is then placed in the hole surrounding the tree just to the height of the ball or slightly lower to allow for some settling. Be careful not to compress the back fill soil as this may prevent water from reaching the roots and the roots from expanding beyond the ball.

Planting Bare-Rooted Trees:

Planting bare-rooted trees is a little different as there is no soil surrounding the roots. Most importantly, the time between purchase and planting is a more critical issue. Plant as soon as possible. When purchasing bare-rooted trees, inspect the roots to ensure that they are moist and have numerous lengths of fine root hairs (healthy). Care should be taken to ensure that the roots are kept moist in the period between purchase and planting. Prune broken or damaged roots but save as much of the root structure as you can.

To plant, first build a cone of earth in the center of the hole around which to splay the roots. Make sure that when properly seated on this cone the tree is planted so that the 'trunk flare' is clearly visible and the 'crown', where the roots and top meet, is about two inches above the soil level. This is to allow for natural settling.

Planting Container Trees:

Container trees can also be stored for a brief period of time after purchase as long as the soil in the container is kept moist and the tree stored in a shady spot. In the case of metal or plastic containers, remove the container completely. In the case of fiber containers, tear the sides away. Once carefully removed from the container, check the roots. If they are tightly compressed or 'potbound', use your fingers or a blunt instrument to carefully tease the fine roots away from the tight mass and then spread the roots prior to planting. In the case of extremely woody compacted roots, it may be necessary to use a spade to open up the bottom half of the root system. The root system is then pulled apart or 'butterflied' prior to planting. Loosening the root structure in this way is extremely important in the case of container plants. Failure to do so may result in the roots 'girdling' and killing the tree. To further assist this, lightly break up even the soil outside the planting zone. This allows roots that quickly move out of the planting zone to be more resilient as they anchor into existing surrounding soil conditions. Once the tree is seated in the hole, the original soil is then back-filled into the hole to the soil level of the container. Again, remember not to overly compress the back-filled soil especially by tramping it with your feet. Compress gently using your hands instead.

Fertilizers and Other Soil

Amendments:

After you plant your tree, there are certain products that can be added to the soil to help the roots establish themselves. A root-promoting fertilizer can help, but ensure that the fertilizer is not simply placed in the planting hole. Fertilize the soil around the planting hole as well to promote root expansion.



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