

Planting Trees

When to Plant

The best time to plant a tree in our area is right after leaf-drop which occurs sometime in mid to late November.

December and early January are good times, too.

Why is that?

In our area, tree roots grow throughout the fall and winter because the soil doesn't freeze. A newly planted tree, although dormant above ground, can develop new roots throughout November, December, January, February, and March. That's almost four full months of energy dedicated almost entirely to root development! Fall-planted trees perform better than trees planted in spring or summer and have the advantage of a more developed root system when the warm months arrive.

Choose a planting location

Consider whether a tree in the chosen location will shade your home or air conditioning unit, or serve as a buffer for winter winds. Make sure the tree will not block your view or interfere with water or sewer mains, telephone or cable wires, or gas or electric lines as it matures.

Allow generous room for growth

Ensure that the tree will have plenty of room to grow; both downward and outward into the ground and upward and outward into the air above. Locate a tree away from houses or other structures by at least half of its estimated mature height. For example, allow 25 feet on all sides of a tree that will grow to 50 feet. Be sure to space large trees 50 feet apart, medium trees 35 feet apart, and small trees 20 feet apart.

Evaluate planting area conditions

Determine whether the chosen location receives shade, dappled shade, part shade or full sun. Evaluate soil type and moisture levels.

Soils

The Dallas metropolitan area has three major types of soils:

Blackland Prairie - Deep, alkaline, clay-like, drains slowly.

Escarpment -Shallow, alkaline, rocky, drains well.

Sandy Loam - A mixture of sand and clay, deep, acidic, drains well.

Be sure to check other soil conditions that will affect the future growth and success of your trees such as low fertility, compaction and pollution contamination.

Soil Testing

Don't guess about something as important as your soil. For more information on getting your soil tested, check out <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/>.

Nursery selection

Look for the following when purchasing a tree.

Select a tree with a straight, single leader.

Avoid damaged bark.

Avoid broken or damaged limbs.

If tree is dormant, scratch the bark to make sure it is moist and green inside.

Make sure the root ball is moist or the container and soil is moist and the roots are not exposed .

Planting steps

Your planting hole should be as deep as the root ball and at least twice as wide. Be sure to slope and roughen the sides of the hole so roots can grow easily through the surrounding soil.

Position

Handle the tree gently by the root ball or the container to prevent trunk damage. If the tree is in a container, lay the tree on its side and roll the container until it slips off of the root ball. Using a sharp knife, slice the root system in four places to prevent circling root growth in the ground.

Place the tree in the center of the hole, making sure that it stands straight. The bottom of the root ball should sit on the undisturbed soil. The top of the root ball should be even with but no more than 2” higher than the surrounding ground. If the root ball is burlapped, carefully cut away and remove all binding strings, wire and material.

Backfill

Fill the hole halfway with original soil. Soak the soil with water to remove air pockets. Then add the remaining soil and soak again. Do not add any fertilizer to the original soil. The tree’s root system will develop better without additives.

Mulch

Add 2 to 3 inches of mulch to the planting area. Mulch insulates the soil, arrests weeds, retains moisture, adds nutrients, and prevents soil compaction. Be sure to keep mulch away from the tree trunk.

Water

Water your new tree on a regular basis for the first two years to encourage a strong root system. During the summer, water once weekly if there is no rainfall. Keep the soil moist, but avoid over watering. Too much water makes leaves yellow or fall off.

Finish

Remove any protective trunk wrapping. Studies show that trunk wrap can retain unwanted temperatures and moisture against the bark and invites and conceals insect infestations. Remove all tags and labels. Prune away dead or damaged limbs. (Do no other pruning at this time.) Add an expandable collar to the base of the tree for protection from lawn care machinery.

Avoid staking the tree unless it is totally unstable. Staking can prevent the tree trunk’s adjustment to winds and prevent the development of flexibility and normal taper. If staking is necessary, use broad, flexible material to secure the tree to the stakes. Remove the stakes after one or two growing seasons.