**Good Time to Plant Trees and Shrubs**

After a summer that was very hard on Central Texas Trees we seem to have moved into a much more favorable weather pattern. Most everyone thinks about planting trees and shrubs in the spring; however, now that we have some good soil moisture this would be an excellent time to plant in our area. The cooler temperatures make it easier on both you and your plantings. The cooler days between now and winter will give the plant a chance to get its roots established this fall and be ready to grow come next spring. You would not want to plant bare root trees or shrubs right now, but it is a good time to plant container shrubs and trees or balled and burlap trees. It is important to be sure you are ready before you get your trees. Proper planning can make a big difference in the survival of your new trees or shrubs. Here is a little information about planting either balled and burlapped trees or container trees and shrubs.

Container plants have the advantage of having all of their roots intact and ready to grow if the pot was properly cared for. Be careful that the container tree does not have girdling issues and is not root bound. If the tap root has begun to circle the pot it is best to cut the taproot back and let it start new. When planting a container grown plant dig a hole bigger than the plant by double the width but no deeper. Remove the container and plant into the hole as quickly as possible. Air kills the little white hair roots very fast if not put into the ground.

Balled and burlapped plants are not container grown and you need to understand that before ordering them. These plants may have been grown in a nursery, but they were dug out of the ground so that many of the roots have been cut off. When you get a balled and burlapped plant remove all plastic including any string or twine. You can leave the burlap if it is not plastic. The biggest problem with balled and burlapped trees is that the hole is usually dug with the same tree spade that dug the tree. Tree spades leave the hole side very slick and hard for roots to penetrate. The best hole is wider but not deeper than the ball.

Here is Texas A&M Forest Services 12 step process for planting container or balled and burlapped trees.

**1) Select the right tree for your location.**

Use a tree that will grow well in your part of the state and make sure it has plenty of room— vertically and horizontally—for the canopy and roots to grow.

**2) Dig the hole at least twice as wide as the root ball.**

Dig a square hole no deeper than the root ball. This keeps the roots from settling too deep while still allowing them to penetrate the surrounding soil.

**3) Fill the empty hole with water and check the drainage.**

If it takes longer than 24 hours to drain, select another site. A tree will die if its roots are underwater for long periods of time.

**4) Prune the tree sparingly and only if necessary.**

Remove only dead, broken and diseased branches and roots that are crushed and girdling, or growing around the main stem. Removing even a small portion of healthy canopy actually slows root growth and delays establishment. A thoughtfully selected tree shouldn’t need to be pruned.

**5) Set the tree in the hole with the root collar (area just above the roots) flush or slightly above natural grade.**

Planting too deep is a leading cause of mortality in newly planted trees. Don’t pick up the tree by the trunk. Always handle by the container or root ball.

**6) Remove all foreign materials from the root ball.**

This includes wires, twine, cords, containers and non-biodegradable bags. If planting a tree with roots wrapped in burlap, remove as much of the burlap as possible. This allows water to seep in and the roots to grow out.

**7) Gently fill the hole with the same soil that came out of the hole.**

Do not add soil amendments. Settle the soil with water. Packing the soil damages and breaks fine roots.

**8) Stake the tree only if necessary.**

Consult a professional if staking is required. Stakes should not be left in place more than one year.

**9) Mulch around the tree at least out to the drip line, two to three inches deep and up to but not touching the trunk.**

Wood chips, pine bark, leaf litter and hay are great mulches. Mulching keeps soil temperature fairly steady, boosts soil moisture retention and keeps weeds at bay. Organic mulches add nutrients to the soil as they decompose.

**10) Water the tree for at least the first two years, but don’t over water.**

A newly planted tree requires six to eight gallons of water for every diameter inch of trunk—per week. A thorough soaking is much better than light, frequent watering.

**11) Protect the tree from animals and humans.**

Staking to the ground a wire-mesh cage at least three feet in diameter and four feet tall can keep deer and livestock from eating your tree. It also can safeguard your tree from motorized weed-eaters, which can easily kill your tree.

**12) Do not fertilize the tree during the first growing season.**

Too much nitrogen will burn tender roots, slowing growth and delaying establishment.