Fall [is] Ideal for Planting

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

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PHOTO BY **Herman Auer**

On Saturday, October 10, 2015, twenty-one Galveston County 4-H youth and parents met with members of Galveston County Master Gardener Association to plant a Bur Oak tree near the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park in La Marque. This activity was part of an annual One Day 4-H Service Project.

The spring season is typically seen by most people as the time for new growth in the home landscape leading them to think of planting trees in the landscape during the spring season. However, fall is the ideal season for planting trees (as well as shrubs and other assorted plants) in the Upper Gulf Coast region of Texas.

Many people prefer January through March for planting landscape trees but the fall months of October through December have distinct advantages. Fall planting follows the heat of summer before a cool winter season, and trees planted in the fall utilize this time period to their advantage.

Tree roots grow anytime the soil temperature is 40 degrees or higher, which occurs throughout most (if not all) of the winter season in our region of Texas. When spring arrives, a well-established root system can better support the energy demands of emerging leaves.

My close friends know of my fondness of quoting adages, proverbial phrases and other short statements of wisdom or advice. As a horticulturist, I find the following quotation by Nelson Henderson to be germane to this week's column: "The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

On Saturday, October 10, 2015, twenty-one Galveston County 4-H youth and parents met with members of Galveston County Master Gardener Association to plant an oak tree near the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park in La Marque. This was part of an annual One Day 4-H Service Project.

It wasn't just any tree though, as it has a specific meaning. The Texas A&M Forest Service provided one Bur Oak tree to each county in Texas so it may be planted by youth from local 4-H clubs "....in some notable public venue where it can be seen and appreciated by those in the community."

The tree provided is commonly known as Bur Oak (botanical name: *Quercus macrocarpa*) and it is native to north central Texas. Bur Oak is one of few trees that can grow successfully in all 254 counties of Texas.

This year's One Day 4-H Service Project was designed to help celebrate the Texas A&M Forest Service's centennial anniversary. For 100 years, the

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service has been helping protect and save the lives of Texans through its many efforts. Personnel with Texas A&M Forest Service provided pivotal support in assessing damage caused by Hurricane Ike in 2008 to Galveston Island's urban tree forest.

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While its massive size counts this tree out for most urban and suburban yards, the Bur Oak is a great choice for parks, institutional grounds and expansive yards. A mature Bur Oak can be expected to grow 60 to 70 feet in height and width and is very drought resistant. The Bur Oak has the largest acorns of all oaks native to Texas; they are distinguished by very deep fringed cups. The common name (sometimes spelled Burr) describes the cup of the acorn, which slightly resembles the spiny bur of a chestnut.

The Texas State Champion Bur Oak is located in Plano, TX in Tarrant County. Plano's oldest Bur Oak is 90 feet tall, 186 inches in circumference and has a crown spread of 80 feet. This tree was designated as a Bicentennial Tree in 1987 and was recognized as growing in Plano at same time the U.S. Constitution was signed, September 17, 1787. That would mean that Plano's Bur Oak was already more than 30 years old at the time of the signing. The Bur Oak, as with many oaks, is a very long-lived tree. The average life span is between 200 and 400 years. The oldest known Bur Oak, on record, lived for 402 years.

What guidelines did I give to the 4-H youth who planted the Bur Oak? I reminded them that the greatest cause of death of newly planted trees is planting the root ball too deep. My advice was to plant the tree's root ball slightly above (1-to-2 inches) the level of the surrounding soil to allow for settling and increased soil drainage. Dig a hole

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large enough in diameter so that the root ball has at least 6-to-12 inches of clearance on all sides before backfilling the planting hole.

This allows the feeder roots to more easily grow out into the looser topsoil. Use the same soil that was dug out to create the planting hole to backfill the planting hole. Then make sure that the area is mulched with 3-4 inches of shredded pine bark mulch. Water the planting hole thoroughly to get rid of air pockets in the back fill surrounding the root ball.

I digress to my opening quotation by Nelson Henderson regarding planting trees. While I suspect that some of the youngest 4-H youth did not fully comprehend the generational impact of planting the Bur Oak on October 10, I also suspect that some will return to visit the tree as they reach adulthood. (I asked one nine-year-old youngster how old she would be when this oak is 200 years old? She promptly replied that she would be 209 years old.)

I further suspect that some of these 4-H youth will return with their

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children to the planting site to sit in the shade of a tree that they might not have expected to sit. I even suspect that some of their grandchildren and great grandchildren might do the same.