



## **FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...**

### **FALL TREE PLANTING**

By

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In Palo Pinto County, planting trees in the fall gives them a nice long growth period to prepare for our hot summers. Before buying a tree, several things should be considered:

- a) What is the purpose of the tree? Shade? Spring or Summer Bloom? Fall Foliage? Winter Interest?
- b) What will be the mature height and width of the tree? There are right and wrong places to plant a tree.
- c) How is the root ball packaged? Container Grown, Balled & Burlapped, or Bare Root

If you know the purpose for planting a tree, but don't know which trees are right for Palo Pinto County, you can ask your favorite nurseryman or call the Palo Pinto Extension Office (940-659-1228).

When choosing a location, consider the mature size of the tree, light availability, and the area that will be shaded by the tree. The area must allow for healthy root ball growth. Do NOT plant too close to a structure, power line, concrete driveway, or street or in front of the home's most important focal point.

Trees available at most local nurseries have been grown in containers. This makes the tree easier to transport and reduces transplant shock. However, the roots may have girdled (followed the inside curve of the container). When the tree is removed from the container, the roots along the outside of the root ball should be gently cut to stimulate new outward growth. If girdling is not stopped, it is likely the roots will never establish proper spread and the tree's life can be shortened.

A balled and burlapped tree has been grown in the ground. When the nursery digs it up, a ball of dirt containing the roots is kept intact by wrapping it with burlap and a wire cage. This wrapping must be protected during transportation and planting. When the tree is planted, the wire cage is removed, but the burlap can be left in place.

Some trees are sold "bare root". These are usually planted in the dead of winter while the tree is dormant. The nursery removes the soil it was grown in and packs it in sawdust or other packing material that will protect the roots. If you dig the tree yourself, transport the tree with protection on the roots. Before

planting, the tree needs to be rehydrated by soaking in water. The hole must be dug large enough to allow the roots to be placed in the same pattern in which they were growing.

After all these choices, it is time to plant the tree. First, locate the tree's flare. The flare is at the base of the trunk where it swells out to become roots. When the tree is placed in the hole, the flare should be above ground level.

The hole should be dug twice as wide in diameter and no deeper than the root ball. The material dug out of the hole should be saved so the hole can be refilled with that same soil. (If the hole is filled with some nice rich potting soil, the roots won't want to leave. Girdling--remember girdling?--could occur).

When removing the tree from the container, lay it down and ease it out of the container. Never remove the tree from the container by grasping the trunk and lifting.

Once the tree is in the hole, look and see if it is straight, the best side is showing and the flare is above the soil. Fill the hole half way and water deeply. Fill the rest of the hole and water again. A berm can be created around the outside of the tree to help keep water focused on the root ball. The berm can be smoothed out at a later date if you wish. Do NOT add fertilizer when planting. The delicate new roots could be burned.

Add 3" of mulch to the newly planted tree area keeping the mulch away from the trunk so it can breathe. If staking is necessary to keep the tree straight, pad the wires so they don't damage the trunk.

Establish a regular slow, deep-watering schedule for the newly planted tree. Provide one inch a week if it doesn't rain. It takes about 1-1/2 years of supplemental water before a tree can survive on rainfall only. Even after that time, once a month watering will help a tree survive drought or extreme heat. Remember to water in the fall and winter...dormant trees still need water.

If you have questions, please call the County Extension Office at 940-659-1228.