

Fall is for Planting
Greg Grant, Tyler Morning Telegraph
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I love fall even more than I do spring. It's the perfect time to work on your landscape. Perhaps you have an area that needs a makeover. Fall is the best season for planting trees, shrubs, and woody vines, followed by winter, and then spring. Summer is the worst. Autumn is also the time to plant cool season flowering annuals, cool season vegetables, and spring blooming perennials and bulbs.

Plant roots grow anytime the soil temperature is 40 degrees or higher, which may occur all winter in Texas. During the winter months, the root systems of fall-planted plants develop and become established. When spring arrives, this expanded root system can survive its first hot, dry summer with much less stress and watering.

Think about the plant's needs before you invest. Is it adapted to your soil type? Will it grow in sun or shade? Does it need a wet or dry location? Is it cold hardy or heat tolerant? Thankfully, most nurseries have this type of information alongside the plant. For more information visit the Earth-Kind section of the Aggie Horticulture website and read the publication titled "Plant Selections."

Whether you are planting a single plant or an entire landscape, plan first, then plant. Good planning is a worthwhile investment of time that pays off in greater enjoyment of attractive landscaping and in increasing the value of your home. A landscape plan saves many planting mistakes.

Every plant in the landscape should serve a purpose. Ask yourself if you need screening, shade, or an individual specimen. How large will it be when it matures? Remember, that a small one-gallon plant will look entirely different when it "grows up."

Here are a few guidelines on planting properly.

- Dig a hole large enough in diameter so that the root system has at least six inches of clearance on all sides. The root ball should rest

on a solid soil foundation, so don't dig the hole deeper than the ball.

- Plant the tree or shrub slightly above the level of the surrounding soil, to allow for settling and increased soil drainage.
- Carefully place the tree or shrub in the hole. Handle the plant by the root ball, not by the trunk. Always remove any container before you plant.
- Backfill the hole, using only the native soil removed from the hole; do not use soil amendments when planting trees. Fill the hole, and firm the soil around the plant. Water thoroughly to settle the soil around the roots and to eliminate air pockets.
- Do not fertilize your trees or shrubs after planting. Wait until early in the spring and then, go lightly. Heavy applications of fertilizer may burn the root system and could kill the plant.
- At the time of transplanting, soak the plant in the container first. A thorough watering every 7 to 10 days, if it doesn't rain, dramatically increases success. More frequent watering may encourage root rot. Remember more trees and shrubs fail from over watering than from under watering.
- Add 4 to 6 inches of mulch around the base of newly planted trees and shrubs. This helps to prevent weeds, keeps the soil warmer during the winter, and conserves moisture during the summer. Use pine needles, shredded bark, or coarse compost.

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**A&M AgriLife Extension Service can be found at
aggieturf.tamu.edu and aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu.**

Image caption: *Fall is the best time to plant trees, shrubs, and woody vines.*