



Nuttall Oak

The cool season, November through March, is the ideal time for planting hardy trees and shrubs in the landscape.

ADVANTAGES OF FALL PLANTING

Planting hardy trees and shrubs in the fall from mid November through mid December is especially good since they benefit in several ways. The plants are going dormant or are dormant during this time and are less likely to suffer as much from transplant shock. This is particularly important for balled and burlapped trees since they lose a lot of roots when they are dug up.

In addition, the mild weather and regular rainfall typical during the winter here allow the new plantings to settle in and adjust with little stress (and less work for you watering them). And, you needn't be concerned about whatever freezes winter might bring. Hardy trees and shrubs are not damaged by normal winter freezes, even if newly planted.

Though the tops are dormant, the roots of trees and shrubs will actively grow during the fall and winter. Research shows that the roots of plants continue to grow and develop during our mild winters, even though the foliage is dormant. Although the tops of the plants are not actively growing, the root system is active whenever the soil temperature is 50 to 60 degrees F.

Compared to planting trees and shrubs in the spring, planting in fall allows them to become better established prior to spring growth and the intense heat of summer. By May of the next year, trees and shrubs planted in the fall will have grown roots out into the surrounding soil increasing their ability to absorb water and survive that first stressful summer after planting.

SELECTING TREES FOR THE LANDSCAPE

Trees are a vital part of most landscapes and can provide shade, privacy, windbreaks, fruit or nuts, flowers and increase real-estate value. Select and place them carefully because trees are a part of your landscape that will be around for a long time, and mistakes are not easily corrected later on when the trees are large.

There is no one perfect tree for Louisiana. All trees have advantages and disadvantages depending on the planting location and desired characteristics. Here are some points you need to consider:

> Think about the desired **mature** size. Planting a tree that will grow too large for its location is one of the most common mistakes people make (along with planting too many trees). A patio might benefit from a small 15 to 25 foot tall tree planted nearby, but be completely overwhelmed by a large tree. Generally, small trees are those that grow from 15 to 25 feet tall, medium sized trees grow from 30 to 55 feet tall and large trees are those that grow 60 feet or taller. Larger trees, such as live oaks, sycamores and pecans, generally grow too large for the average urban or suburban lot.

> Think about the purpose of the tree and why it is needed. This will help you determine what characteristics the tree should have such as its shape, size and rate of growth. Ornamental features should also be considered such as flowers, attractive berries, brightly colored fall foliage or unusual bark.

> Decide if you want a tree that retains its foliage year-round (evergreen) or loses its leaves in the winter (deciduous). Deciduous trees are particularly useful where you want shade in the summer and sun in the winter. Small to medium size evergreen trees are useful as sound barriers or privacy screens.

> Choose trees that are well adapted to our local growing conditions. They must be able to tolerate long, hot summers and mild winters, which makes a variety of northern species you might see in catalogs unsuitable for our area. Trees that are not completely hardy are not good choices either.

> Don't forget to check the location of overhead power lines, and if you must plant under them, use small, low growing trees. Also consider walks, drives and other paved surfaces that may be damaged by the roots of large trees. Locate large trees at least 15 feet away from paved surfaces and your house.

TREE PLANTING GUIDELINES

Planting trees properly is not difficult, but can make the difference between success and failure.

> Whether the tree is balled and burlapped or container grown, dig the hole at least twice the diameter of the root ball and no deeper than the height of the rootball. When placed into the hole, the rootball should sit on solid, undisturbed soil.

> Remove a container grown tree from its container and place the tree gently in the hole. A root ball tightly packed with thick encircling roots indicates a root bound condition. Try to unwrap or open up the root ball to encourage the roots to spread into the surrounding soil. Place a balled and burlapped tree gently in the hole with the burlap intact, then pull out nails that pin the burlap around the root ball, remove any nylon twine or wire supports that may have been used, and fold down the burlap from the top of the rootball. The top of the root ball should be level with or slightly above the surrounding soil. It is critical that you do not plant the tree too deep.

> Thoroughly pulverize the soil dug out from the hole and use this soil – without any additions – to backfill around the tree. Add soil around the tree until the hole is about half full, then firm the soil to eliminate air pockets but do not pack it tight. Finish filling the hole, firm again and then water the tree thoroughly to settle it in. Generally, do not fertilize a newly planted tree. The use of a root stimulator solution is optional as research indicates that they are of little or no benefit.

> If the tree is tall enough to be unstable it should be staked, otherwise it's not necessary. Two or three stakes should be firmly driven into the ground just beyond the root ball. Next, tie cloth strips, old nylon stockings or wire (covered with a piece of garden hose where it touches the trunk) to the stakes and then to the trunk of the tree. Leave the support in place no more than 9 to 12 months.

> You should keep the area two feet out from the trunk mulched and free from weeds and grass. This encourages the tree to establish faster by eliminating competition from grass roots. It also prevents lawn mowers and string trimmers from damaging the bark at the base of the tree, which can cause stunting or death. The mulch should be about two inches deep and pulled back slightly from the base of the tree.

> **Water** a newly planted or transplanted tree whenever the weather is dry. This **is the single most important thing you can do to insure its survival**, especially the first summer after planting. Do not rely on lawn sprinklers to water newly planted trees. One good way to properly water a tree its

first year is to turn a hose on trickle and lay the end on top of the ground within six inches of the trunk. Let the water trickle for about 30 minutes. This should be done once or twice a week during hot, dry weather.

Another option is to use a plastic bucket, such as an old 5 gallon paint bucket or any plastic container about that size. Use a hot ice pick or skewer to make small holes to one side of the bottom of the pot. About 10 holes should do it. Then, place the bucket a few inches away from the trunk with the holes in the bottom near the trunk. Fill this bucket up one to three times a week as needed depending on how dry it is. Watering should be considered anytime about 7 days goes by without a good rain.

PRUNING YOUNG TREES

We generally don't prune newly planted young trees the first year or two after they are planted in the ground. Every leaf is a food factory that helps the young tree make the food it needs to get established in its new location. However, whatever height from the ground a branch is formed, it will stay that height from the ground for the life of the branch. A branch that is currently four feet from the ground will always be four feet from the ground. So, over time the lower branches have to be pruned from the tree in order to raise the tree's canopy to the desired height.

When the tree has been in the ground a year or more, prune off all the branches on the lower third of the trunk during winter. If a tree is about 8 feet tall, you can prune off all of the branches below about 30 inches off of the ground. As the years go by, you will continue to remove the lower branches, maintaining about one-third trunk to two-thirds leafy canopy (or at least about one-half trunk to one-half leafy canopy). Continue this until you have raised the canopy to the height you desire.

Prepared by:

Dan Gill, Consumer Horticulture Specialist, LSU AgCenter

https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/ornamentals/trees_shrubs/tree-selection-and-planting