

Tree Planting Basics

*If new tree is potted, remove pot and untangle congested roots. If roots are tangled tightly, cut clean through in three or four places. If new tree is ball-and-burlap, cut loose all ropes and remove as much burlap as possible, cutting it if necessary. Try not to handle the root-ball roughly; keeping it intact will prevent small feeder roots from breaking, which will help the tree settle in quickly.

*The hole for the tree should be the the same depth as the rootball, and preferably twice as wide. It is better for the tree to sit slightly higher than ground level rather than below. Look for a slight swelling at the base of the tree. This flare should be above ground, and is the critical area of the lower trunk for long-term health. Avoid injuring this area, and don't allow mulch to pile up against the lower trunk.

*Don't amend the soil that goes back in around the new tree. In our clay-based soils, you will essentially be planting in a clay pot if you add all sorts of goodies to the backfill. The roots of your new tree will indeed like that in the short term, but over time will circle and circle in the good stuff rather than colonize into the surrounding native soil. This might not only strangle the tree over time, but will make it unstable in wind as it grows taller. It is much better practice to use a quality mulch - leaf mulch is ideal - and let the worms and decomposition feed the new tree.

*Water thoroughly after planting. This means more water than you might think; it's often a good idea to let a hose trickle for several hours at the base of the trunk to ensure saturation. This settles the disturbed soil and gives dehydrated roots a refreshment. After this initial soaking, it may not be necessary to water again for a week or more, depending on weather conditions, but keep an eye on the tree for at least the next six months. Droopy leaves, dull coloration, and/or leaf drop all indicate dry conditions at the root. When it is necessary to give supplemental water, do so in the same manner - thoroughly!

*Never ever ever mound mulch around the tree trunk, volcano-style. This invites disease and pestilence! Aim instead for a large doughnut around the tree, with the hole punctured by the trunk. Mounding it like a doughnut helps funnel moisture and nutrients toward the root ball. Mulching will be beneficial for at least the first three years, fending off weeds and holding moisture, breaking down into natural nutrition, and moderating the soil temperatures while the young tree settles in. Once established, mulch often does more harm than good to trees.

