

I KNOW TREES

Plant a tree the right way

By **KERRY KELLAM**
SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

Every nursery I drive by lately has a plethora of fresh trees on display. It's a beautiful sight.

Most of these trees will be gone in a few weeks, planted in yards across the Metroplex and doing their part in the battle against global warming.

Unfortunately, many of the little trees sold every year (most, I suspect) don't survive long enough to help the environment. Here are a few suggestions:

■ **Make sure you have room to plant a tree.**

As an arborist, I like to see as many shade trees planted as possible. Unfortunately, arborists spend lots of time removing perfectly healthy trees because 10 or 15 years ago somebody planted one where it didn't have room to grow. There's no shame in planting a little ornamental tree or group of ornamentals where space is limited. Properly pruned, a yaupon holly or redbud can serve as an excellent shade tree in a small patio area or courtyard where most conventional shade trees would grow to overwhelm the site.

■ **Dig the hole before you buy the tree.** It's important to know what kind of soil you're dealing with before you buy a tree. This is especially true if you have your heart set on a species sensitive to soil type, such as most pines or Japanese maple. These prefer loamy, more acidic soils than are typical in our area. If you discover soil

KELLAM Declare your hope for a brighter future by planting a tree the right way — and don't forget the mulch!

incompatible with your tree of choice, you can pick another species or, if you feel up to the task, create an earth mix that will support your tree by amending the native soil.

It's important to dig a hole three times larger in diameter than the root ball of the tree you intend to plant. This loosens up the surrounding area and makes it easier for the tree's roots to grow away from the root ball. And, because large holes are harder to dig than small ones, it helps determine the size of tree you buy. Depth can be adjusted once the tree is selected. The top of the root ball should be at or slightly above ground level to allow the surface roots to breathe.

■ **Bigger is not necessarily better.**

Trees grow. The tree you buy is not the finished product. Sure, instant shade is great if you can afford it, but larger transplanted trees suffer more stress and are more likely to die than smaller ones.

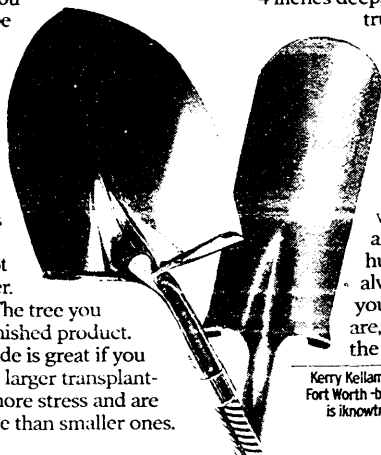
Properly planted and maintained with adequate irrigation and fertilization, small trees — within a few growing seasons — usually catch up to larger counterparts planted at the same time.

If you want a larger tree — say 3-inch trunk diameter and up — research has shown that balled and burlaped trees perform better than container-grown.

■ **Mulch, mulch, mulch.**

Don't leave the nursery without mulch. Composted hardwood mulch, cedar mulch, cypress mulch — these are all good. Dedicate as large an area as possible around your new tree to mulch, and it will have a better chance of surviving. Lay the mulch 3-4 inches deep, and don't pile it against the trunk, please. Fertilize with an organic fertilizer after one year, then annually in the fall.

Planting a tree can help counter the fear and uncertainty that threaten to dominate our lives. It's an act of faith that, in spite of war, weapons of mass destruction and seemingly insoluble human conflicts, life is and always will be worth living. As you care for your new tree, you are, in a very real sense, caring for the whole world.



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