



HOW TO PLANT A TREE OR SHRUB

Digging the Hole

Digging the hole for your tree or shrub is one of the most important steps in planting it successfully. The hole should be at least twice the diameter of the tree's or shrub's root ball, and twice as deep. If the hole is too shallow, the roots will not be covered with soil – and thus will not be able to eat or drink. Too deep and the roots will not have access to sufficient oxygen to ensure proper growth. Too narrow and the root structure will not be able to expand sufficiently to nourish and properly anchor the tree. Too wide – and you've put in more effort than needed!

As a general rule, trees should be transplanted no deeper than the soil in which they were originally grown.

When digging in poorly drained clay soil, it is important to avoid 'glazing'. **Glazing occurs when the sides and bottom of a hole become smoothed forming a barrier through which water has difficulty passing.** To break up the glaze, use a fork to work the bottom and drag the points along the sides of the completed hole. Also, raise the center bottom of the hole slightly higher than the surrounding area. This allows water to disperse, reducing the possibility of water pooling in the planting zone.



Amending the Soil

Given the generally poor quality of the soil in our area (either clay or marl, or sand), it is important to amend the soil you have dug to form the hole before using it to refill and settle-in the plant. Good quality soil is light and fluffy, providing plenty of air pockets through which the roots can grow and breathe. It is also heavy enough to retain some moisture and provide something for the roots to grab hold of. Any good quality soil amendment can be used. Two favorites of Laurel Oak's are Bumper Crop and Black Forest – both organic soil amendments. If your soil is especially poor, replace all of the dirt dug from the hole with amended soil. If your soil is of reasonable health, mix ½ of the soil dug from the hole with an equal amount of soil amendment.

Feeding the Plant

At the time of planting is your one opportunity to ensure your new tree or shrub has the nutrients it needs to survive, grow and flourish. A **starter** fertilizer should be used. Starter fertilizers help the plant focus on growing and establishing its root system – which is needed when a plant is first planted. Mix an appropriate amount of fertilizer (following product directions) gently in the dirt at the bottom of the hole. For larger trees, also mix some in to the amended soil as you refill the hole. Laurel Oak recommends Dr. Earth or Biotone starter fertilizers.

Planting Balled and Burlapped (B&B) Trees or Shrubs

B & B trees should always be lifted by the ball, not by the trunk. The burlap surrounding the ball of earth and roots should either be cut away completely (mandatory, in the case of synthetic or plastic burlap) or at least pulled back from the top third of the ball (in the case of natural burlap). Any string or twine should also be removed. If your tree has a metal cage around the root ball, it is not necessary to remove it prior to planting. Once your tree is positioned in the hole (make certain it's centered and straight!) backfill the hole with your amended soil mixture. Fill the hole surrounding the tree just to the height of the ball or slightly lower to allow for some settling. Be careful not to compress the back fill soil as this may prevent water from reaching the roots and the roots from expanding beyond the ball.

Planting Container Trees

The procedure for planting container trees is similar to that for B & B trees. Carefully remove the plant from the container by holding the plant as close to the soil as possible and gently tugging. If the plant is stuck, place the container on the ground and gently roll it while pressing down with your arms or knee.

Once the plant is out of the pot, check the roots. If they are tightly compressed or 'potbound', use your fingers or a blunt instrument (to minimize root tearing) to carefully tease the fine roots away from the tight mass and then spread the roots prior to planting. In the case of extremely woody compacted roots, it may be necessary to use a spade to open up the bottom half of the root system. The root system is then pulled apart or 'butterflied' prior to planting. Loosening the root structure in this way is extremely important in the case of container plants. Failure to do so may result in the roots 'girdling' and killing the tree. At the very least, the roots will have difficulty expanding beyond the dimensions of the original container. To further assist this, lightly break up even the soil outside the planting zone. This allows roots that quickly move out of the planting zone to be more resilient as they anchor into existing surrounding soil conditions.



Once the tree is seated in the hole, fill the hole with amended soil to the soil level of the container. Again, remember not to overly compress the back-filled soil especially by tramping it with your feet. Compress gently using your hands instead.

Watering Your New Plants

Be certain to water your new plants thoroughly once planted. Plants drink from their roots, so it is important to provide enough water that it soaks into the ground to the depth of the bottom of the root ball. During their first year in the ground, ensure your new plants get a deep watering at least once a week (twice in extremely hot, dry weather).