

TREE PLANTING - The 12 Step Program

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1) Select an appropriate location for the tree.

Use a tree that will grow well under local environmental conditions and provide it with plenty of space to grow and mature. This includes both vertical and horizontal space for the canopy and plenty of room for root growth.

2) Plant during the proper season.

Between Halloween and Thanksgiving is the best time for planting in Central Texas. Trees are able to get established well before the heat and drought of summer. Planting after March is generally too late.

3) Dig the hole at least twice as wide as the root ball (wider is better).

Wide areas give roots a place to spread and grow. Dig the hole no deeper than the root ball to keep the tree from settling too deep and dig square holes to allow for root penetration out of the hole and into the surrounding soil.

4) Fill the hole with water and check the drainage.

If it takes longer than 24 hours to drain, select another site or another tree. A tree will die if its roots are underwater for long periods of time. Tree roots need air.

5) Prune the tree sparingly only if necessary.

Remove dead, broken, and diseased branches and crushed and girdling roots **only**. Removing even a small portion of the healthy canopy actually slows root growth and delays establishment. A thoughtfully selected tree requires no pruning.

6) Remove all foreign materials from the tree.

This includes wires, twine, cords, containers, tags and especially non-biodegradable bags. If planting a balled and burlapped tree, remove as much of the burlap as possible to allow for water infiltration into the bag and root penetration out of the bag.

7) Set the tree in the hole with the root collar flush or slightly above natural grade.

Planting too deep is a leading cause of mortality of newly planted trees. Do not pick the tree up by the trunk. Always handle by the container or root ball.

8) Gently backfill with the same soil that came out of the hole.

Create a natural environment, not an artificial one. Do not add soil amendments or fertilizer. Too much nitrogen will burn tender young roots, slowing growth and delaying establishment. Settle the soil with water. Tamping the soil causes compaction and damages roots.

9) Stake the tree only if necessary.

Consult a professional if staking is required. Stakes should not be left in place longer than 1 year.

10) Mulch the tree out to the drip line, 2-3 inches deep, and up to but not touching the trunk.

Wood chips, pine bark, leaf litter, hay, etc. are great mulches. Mulch keeps soil temperature fluctuations to a minimum and increases soil moisture retention. Mulch also suppresses weed growth and organic mulch adds nutrients to the soil.

11) Protect the tree from animals (this includes humans).

A wire-mesh cage at least 3 feet in diameter and 4 feet tall staked to the ground works miracles. Deer and livestock will eat your tree if it is not protected and weed-whackers will kill your tree in an instant.

12) Perform routine maintenance for at least two growing seasons.

This includes biannual weed control, yearly mulch replacement, weekly watering (6 to 8 gallons per diameter inch of trunk) and protection maintenance. Prune and fertilize only if necessary.