

## Proper Tree Planting

Now is the time of year that many people are planting trees. Properly planting a tree does not take that much effort, but it is definitely more involved than just digging a hole in the ground and throwing the tree in.

Let's start with how deep you need to plant your tree. This can have severe long-term effects on your tree if not done properly. At least 60% of premature tree death is attributed to planting too deeply. Insects or disease will finish off the tree, but the root cause is usually planting too deep. It is hard to comprehend that something you did incorrectly 10 – 15 years ago could be the problem.

So how do you determine the correct depth to plant your tree? You need to find where the first main root comes out from the tree. This is called the root flare. Most of the time it is not at the original soil line of the soil ball. You will have to dig around to find it. Once the root flare is found, remove all of the excess soil above it from the root ball.

The root flare is going to determine the depth of the hole. The flare should be 1-2" above ground level. The distance from the trunk flare to the bottom of the soil ball is the depth of the hole that you want to dig. You want the bottom of the soil ball to be resting on firm, undisturbed soil.

The width of the planting hole should be a minimum of 2-3 times as wide as the soil ball. By making a very wide planting hole, you are breaking up the soil the roots will be growing into. This makes it easier for the root system to establish itself in its new environment. This holds especially true when dealing with clay soils. A little extra effort in

this area goes a long ways for the future of your tree.

What about soil amendments? I do not recommend amending the soil. Put back in what you took out. Amending the soil only within the planting hole has no long-term advantages for your tree. Studies have shown that too many amendments in the planting hole can actually have detrimental effects on the longevity of your trees. Your tree has to grow and adapt to the area that you plant it into. Proper tree selection and a wide planting hole are two great ways that can help with this transition.

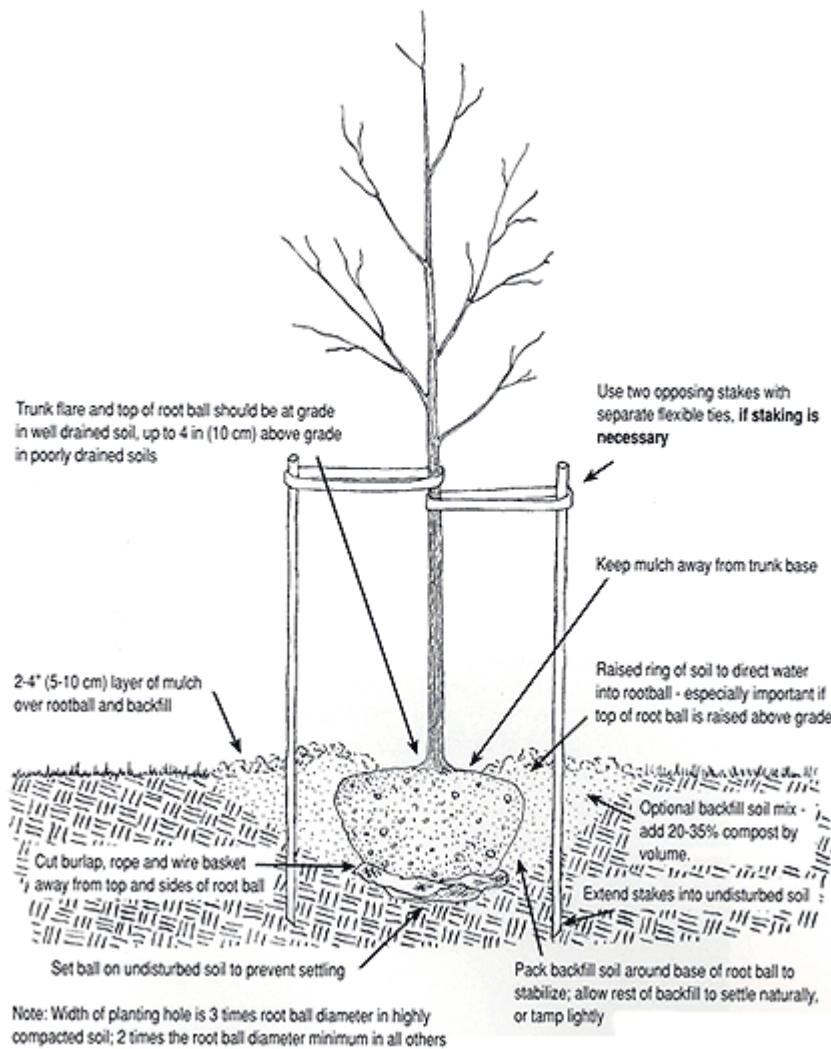
When planting a containerized tree, you need to break up the soil ball a little. Use your hands to tease the roots on the sides and the bottom. Be a little rough to make sure you break it up well, but do not get too crazy.

With a ball and burlap tree, cut the wire basket  $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{2}{3}$  off. This will make sure that the wire will not impede root growth in the future. With the burlap, you can either remove as much as you can, or drop it into the bottom of the hole. The burlap will degrade underground. Make sure that you also remove all of the string from the base and trunk of the tree. This can girdle the stem in the future, which will kill the tree.

Usually, if planted correctly, you will not need stakes. In areas that are excessively windy, staking may not be a bad idea. Two to three stakes will do the job. You do not want the string coming from the stakes to be too taught. Allow the tree to move a little so it can adjust to the wind. Remove the stakes and string in about 3-6 months, but do not wait any longer than one year. The tree may begin to grow into the string.

Make sure to pack the soil firmly around the soil ball, but not so much to greatly compact the soil. You need the air space for root development, and air and water infiltration. Give your tree a good watering, and of course, a proper layer of mulch.

Properly planting your tree is crucial for its long-term survival. Some steps may take a little more time and effort than you are used to, but what is a little extra time when you are planting something that your grandchildren will be playing under someday. Happy planting.



• Tree Planting Diagram: Copyright International Society of Arboriculture. Used with permission.