



Top Ten Tree-Planting Mistakes

1. Poor tree selection: Choose a healthy tree. Poor-quality trees do not grow into high-quality trees, no matter how well you take care of them. Look up, look around: are there overhead lines? What height and width do you ultimately desire? What is already growing well in your yard or in your neighborhood? Choose pest-resistant varieties adapted for the area.

2. Inadequate root system: To give the plant the best possible chance, make sure it has an appropriate root ball for the plant. For every inch of trunk diameter it should have 10 to 12 inches of rootball diameter. Anything less and the tree will suffer more transplant shock and take longer to establish.

3. Poor planting site: Start with a soil test to investigate the pH and fertilizer requirements. Dig a hole to figure out what type of soil profile you are dealing with. Sandy soils may require a more drought-tolerant species and heavy clay soils may require a more moisture-tolerant plant. Check the drainage pattern of the site. If you have low areas, either raise those areas or correct the drainage. If that is not an option, plant a moisture-tolerant plant. Should you amend the soil at the planting site? If you have extremely sandy or heavy clay soils, you may want to amend the backfill to give the plant a good start.



Pot-bound roots

4. Pot bound or girdling root: If the plant is in a container, pull the plant out to see if the plant is root bound by an extreme amount of roots circling the pot. If it is just a small amount, cut the bottom and sides of the root system. Always look for girdling roots that are wrapped around the trunk; even if it is just on one side of the plant cut this root off. If you leave it, the root will eventually choke off the tissue responsible for the uptake of water and nutrients.

5. Planting hole is too small: Ever hear the saying, "Dig a million dollar hole for a \$5 plant"? This is the only chance to do it right. Dig the hole twice as wide as the root ball. This is necessary as new roots will develop horizontally from the existing rootball.

6. Planted too deep: The hole needs to be twice as wide, but this is not true for depth. The planting hole should be no deeper than the root ball itself. If anything, it

should be a little shallow, especially if you are planting in heavy clay or planting a tree that does not tolerate wet feet. Be sure to locate the first level of primary roots and place them at or near the soil surface.

7. The tree is improperly mulched or not mulched at all: Not mulching is one of the worst practices when planting a tree. Mulch buffers the environmental fluctuations of our climate and keeps competition at bay. It keeps



Too much mulch



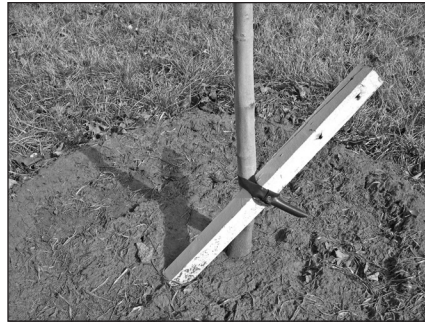
Proper mulching

weeds and grass from sprouting and robbing the moisture from the root system. Using excessive mulch also can be a problem. The mulch should be shaped like a crater, only an inch deep next to the trunk, but 4 inches deep outward toward the root ball. Excessive mulch on the trunk can cause basal rots on the bark.

8. Tree is not staked: Staking is not always required. Small trees or those planted in protected areas may not require staking. Some sources say that staking is detrimental; however, if properly done, the benefits far outweigh any disadvantages. Trees that are tall and leggy or in high-wind areas need to be staked.



Staking overkill



Proper staking

When staking a tree, don't try to keep the top from waving, just try to anchor the root ball. Preventing the root ball from rocking preserves new root hairs growing out of the root ball. Remove the staking material after one season.

9. Improper watering: More newly planted trees drown from too much water than die from not enough water. This happens in heavy clay soils or in over-irrigated fescue lawns. Too much moisture suffocates the roots, although too dry also is a problem. Find a happy medium. Realize that a container tree may require more water than a

balled-and-burlapped tree, a river birch requires more water than a red oak, and a sandy soil requires more frequent watering than a clay soil. Trees should be watered in when planted, again the next day, then in 3 days. In clay soils, balled-and-burlapped trees should be watered every 7 to 10 days through the heat of summer if there is no rain, and once a week in sandy soils. If you have a sprinkler system, that may be sufficient water (or too much) until the hottest part of the summer, when you may have to give the tree additional water. A container-grown tree can dry out during a 100-degree day, so monitor these trees much closer.

10. Failure to monitor: Pay attention to your landscape and seasonal changes. Walk your landscape on a routine basis. You can identify potential issues before they become a problem, it's great exercise and stress relief, and it's an opportunity to enjoy a landscape that you worked hard to achieve.



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