



# Trees:

## Planting & Care of Your New Tree



## Walker County Extension Forestry Committee

### Walker County Extension Service

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Once you have selected your tree, it is time to plant it. Transplants can be classified into three classes according to the way they are dug and/or shipped: bare-rooted, balled and burlapped and container-grown.

#### **Bare-Rooted Trees**

These have had the soil washed or shaken from their roots after digging. Plants handled this way are nearly all deciduous trees or shrubs which are dormant. Most mail order plants are of this class because plants in soil are too heavy to be shipped economically. A good many tap rooted plants, such as nut trees and some fruit and shade trees are handled this way because they are not amenable to balling and burlapping.

Never let the roots dry out, as this is perhaps the single most important source of failure with bare rooted plants. Keep roots in moist sawdust or wrapped in plastic or wet paper until you are ready to place the plant in the hole. This class of plants may need extra pruning at planting time.

**"Never let the  
roots dry out"**

#### **Planting Your Tree**

The proper installation of plants in the landscape involves much more than just digging holes and setting plants in them. The planter is responsible, as far as possible, for developing a satisfactory microclimate for optimum growth and development of the plant. A healthy and vigorous plant is required if the landscape is to achieve the desired effect. Healthy plants will need less maintenance in the years following establishment.

The planting hole is important since this is the environment of the plant root system. Dig a hole no deeper and 6 to 12 inches wider than the root system and no deeper than the original soil level, this

size will be adequate. When transplanting native trees in this method, you may choose to leave the tree 1 to 2 inches higher than it was naturally growing.

Bare root plants should have the packing material and all damaged or dead roots removed. Do not allow roots to be exposed to sunlight or dry out before planting. It is best to keep bare roots covered with moist burlap or some reasonable substitute until planting time.

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***Steps in Planting Your New Bare-rooted Tree:***

1. Protect the roots of the seedling or tree from direct sunlight or heat. If it will be some time before the tree is planted, you may choose to "heel-in" the tree. This consists of placing the tree(s) temporarily in a medium of sawdust or soil which is kept moist until time for planting.
2. Prepare the hole. The hole should be deep enough so the tree may be set down to a point below the original soil level.
3. Place the tree in the hole below the original soil level and cover with loose soil.
4. Lightly pack the soil in the hole around the tree.
5. Pull upward on the tree to set the tree in the hole. This will insure the original soil level of the tree will be at the top of the hole when filled and packed. This procedure prevents the roots from growing improperly (*condition known as "J" rooting*).
6. Lightly compress and pack the soil around the tree while insuring that the tree is in an upright position.
7. Water-in the tree and repack soil if necessary.
8. Adequate soil moisture is critical for several months after transplanting. Water only when necessary, as over-watering will result in sure death. To determine if the soil is dry, check 1 to 2 inches below soil surface.

With bare rooted plants the soil should be worked around the the roots while the plant is being supported. The most satisfactory way of firming the soil and removing air pockets is to fill the hole with water. If it is not practical to use this procedure, firm the soil by hand around the plant roots. Be sure not to use excessive force, since soil compaction should be avoided.

Before finishing the filling process, make certain the plant is straight and at the proper depth then complete the filling process with the backfill. If the specimen is an individual, construct a ring of earth 2-3 inches in height at the edge of the outside diameter of the hole to form a water basin. Water the plant thoroughly as soon as the water basin is constructed. After the water has soaked away, fill the basin with a mulch material. Organic mulches such as pine needles, bark and wood chips provide the best environment for future root development. Note that no fertilizer is added to the backfill mixture. Newly developing roots can be damaged by too much fertilizer. If it is apparent from knowledge of the soil condition, that fertilizer is needed, add a water soluble material at the recommended rate during the final watering phase.

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