

# Tree & Shrub Planting Guide

- **Dig a shallow, broad hole.** Think of it as a saucer, about the depth of root ball, never deeper and twice as wide. The more you can break up the soil around your new tree, the better. On new homesites, much of the soil has been compacted. Also, as most of you have learned, we live in the midst of some tough clay soil! Breaking up the surrounding soil, adding compost and organic matter will help give your tree's roots ample space to push through and grow strong.
- **Find the trunk flare.** The trunk flare is where the roots spread from the base of the tree. This part should not be covered in soil before or after you have planted your tree. Leave it partially visible. Remove some soil from the root ball if you have to.
- **Remove the tree container for containerized trees.** If your tree has a peat pot (brown, paper-feeling and pebbly) it will break down naturally in the soil. But you need to vertically slice it in a few places. Also, always remove the top 3-4" of the peat pot. If you leave it above the planting line, it will wick water from your new plant. Not what we want! If your pot is plastic, remove it totally. Check for circling roots and remove these as needed.
- **Place tree at proper height.** Make sure your hole is not too deep! The roots will develop in the top 12" initially and they need oxygen to grow and flourish. If you place the trunk flare 2-3" above the top of the hole, you will save yourself heartache later! Make sure the tree is straight! Pretty obvious, huh?
- **Fill your hole.** Your backfill material is critical. We suggest using 1/2 soil from the hole you dug and 1/2 compost (Choice, Cotton Boll or Manure). You could also use some Real Manure (100% cattle manure), kitchen compost or the like. Gently pack the soil around the base of the root ball.
- **Stake the tree only if necessary!** Trees grow stronger when trunks and roots are exposed to the elements. The wind actually "tells" the tree to grow stronger roots! If you are worried about animal damage or live on a particularly windy site, feel free to stake. Really though, most stakes should not be necessary after the first few years.
- **Mulch the base of the tree.** Mulch is organic matter applied to the area at the base of the tree. It acts as a blanket to hold moisture, it moderates soil temperature extremes, and it reduces competition from grass and weeds. Some good choices are leaf litter, pine straw, shredded bark, peat moss, or composted wood chips. A 2- to 4-inch layer is ideal. More than 4 inches may cause a problem with oxygen and moisture levels. When placing mulch, be sure that the actual trunk of the tree is not covered. Doing so may cause decay of the living bark at the base of the tree. A mulch-free area, 1 to 2 inches wide at the base of the tree, is sufficient to avoid moist bark conditions and prevent decay. Water correctly. Keep soil evenly moist but not soaked. Ideal watering is once a week for 20-30 minutes or so. If you use a hose, set it to soaker or drip and walk away! The larger the tree, the more water it needs. Signs of too much water include leaf yellowing and drop. If the soil is dry 1 1/2" down, it is dry and needs a drink. If it has been particularly wet, water much less frequently. When the cold weather begins in mid-fall, taper off watering. Trees and shrubs use much less water in cooler temperatures. A nursery tip: watering once a month during cold months can help less mature and less hardy plants survive a tough winter.