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## **If Planting Trees, Now is the Time**

If you want to plant trees, fall is the time to do it, for several reasons. Trees respond to the warm soil temperatures from the summer by growing their root systems deeper, which leads to better long-term health and a faster growth rate. Fall plantings also gives new trees extra time to prepare for summer stress. Lastly, you can confirm the fall color of your desired tree if you are buying in-person from a local nursery or garden center. For this reason, most trees you can grow in our area should be planted around this time of the year. Redbuds, magnolias, tulip poplars and dogwoods are some of the few exceptions that should instead be planted in the spring.

The proper technique for planting a new tree depends on the way it's grown. There are three ways trees are sold – as bare-root seedlings, as container trees, or as ball-and-burlap trees. For container and ball-and-burlap trees, the hole you dig for planting should be 2-3 times as wide as the root ball and slightly shallower than the root ball. The soil will settle once the tree in the hole, so digging the hole deeper than the root ball could lead to the roots being too deep and eventual girdling. If the tree is in ball-and burlap, remove all burlap and any wire baskets to allow free root growth. Backfill the hole with the removed soil, give it a good watering, and the tree will be on its way.

Two things to check for when first planting a tree are girdled roots and the potential for sunscald. Girdled roots are roots that have wrapped around the base of the trunk. Left alone, these roots can choke the tree to death. Often, these roots can be unwound from the trunk to serve as normal roots. If not, these roots should be cut away. Sunscald is a condition caused by direct exposure to intense sunlight during the summer and can cause permanent, sometimes fatal damage to the tree. If the tree is planted in an open area with no shade, sunscald will often occur on the southwest side of the tree. Trunks can be wrapped in the tree's first year to prevent sunscald, or you can leave lower branches instead of pruning them out to provide shade to the trunk. Wrapping should be removed after its first year to allow the trunk to expand.

Just as there are things you should do when planting a tree, there are also things to avoid. You should not amend the hole or apply any fertilizer to the tree. Amending the hole with things like sand or compost can cause water drainage and collection issues, and fertilizing a tree early in its growth discourages roots from seeking out nutrients throughout the soil profile, leading to a weaker root system. Many people stake young trees to provide stability, but these stakes should not prevent the tree from moving. If the tree cannot move, the wires stabilizing the tree are too tight around the trunk and function like a tourniquet, cutting off circulation of water and nutrients. Lastly, do not prune a young tree too heavily. Minor cuts to encourage strong branching structure are acceptable, but the more live growth you can leave on the tree, the more the tree will be able to build up energy reserves for future stresses.

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