

Planting a tree

Choosing a tree carefully and planting it correctly will help to ensure that it has a long, healthy life in whatever role it plays in your garden.

Size

Bigger does not necessarily mean better when it comes to trees and shrubs. Smaller plants are easier to handle, and if they have been propagated well in suitable containers, they can go ahead very quickly and develop into strong, healthy trees with good root systems. They can often overtake the advanced specimen as they often grow feverishly. However, sometimes we have to choose larger plants for aesthetic reasons or simply for visibility so that they are not so easily damaged by mowing, kids, pets etc.

Pruning

Pruning is not necessary unless you are transplanting. Reducing the volume of foliage eases the strain on a plant that has been stressed, however leaving some allows the plant to photosynthesize and make a faster recovery.

The Planting Hole

Dig a sizeable planting hole. Bad holes are too narrow, deep, round and smooth sided. A good planting hole is dish-shaped, twice the width of the plant's root ball - at least three times as wide and more if the surrounding soil is heavily compacted. Don't put compost or manure in the bottom of the planting hole - gases can be produced which will harm the roots of the plant. Do not add fertilizer directly at the root zone, mixed with the planting soil and added beneath the mulch layer is sufficient. Roughen up the sides of the hole so that roots can easily enter the surrounding soil. Smooth sides can resemble the sides of a pot and can cause root circling which can severely limit the growth of the tree.

Planting the Tree

Remember to treat the roots with great care. Don't leave the pot standing in the hot sun while you dig the hole. Ease trees from the pot by their trunks, but try to hold it at the base. Don't pull at roots, "tease them out"! If you find there are roots circling around in the pot, take a sharp knife and score to about 5mm deep down the sides of the root ball in three different places. (Reject any tree that has doubled back roots near the trunk. This is a sign of poor propagation techniques and the tree will invariably be short-lived. Place the tree in the planting hole. Be sure that the top of the potting medium is not below the level of the surrounding soil. If you wish to add organic material to the backfill only add a small amount of well-composted material and mix it in well with the site soil before back filling. Make sure there are no air pockets by pressing down firmly. Keep the top of the potting medium free from back fill soil.

Watering in

Diligent watering during the establishment period of the tree is important. With limited roots, the tree cannot be allowed to dry out. This applies to all species, including drought resistant ones. They will be drought resistant only after their roots are well-established.

Watering should consist of deep soaking, not just light sprinkling. You can build up a small ridge or berm just beyond the root ball to encourage moisture penetration if you wish.

Fertilizing

Apply fertilizer at planting time in very limited amounts. Water well until you see signs of shoot growth. Then you can fertilize more heavily. A slow release fertilizer such as dynamic lifter is a good choice. Remember to place fertilizer away from the trunk - put it in the area where the new roots will be making their way into the site soil.

Mulching

Mulch is important for vital moisture retention and to reduce weed competition. Don't apply mulch too thickly (75mm to 100mm is the maximum for most mulches). If the mulch hasn't been composted, then the fertiliser you use should be high in nitrogen. (Nitrogen is consumed by micro-organisms as they decompose organic material. This is called nitrogen draw-down) Keep mulch well away from the trunk of the tree to prevent fungal attack such as collar rot.