

NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

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Guidelines for Planting Trees Properly

Planting trees is a long-term investment and asset to landscapes. Celebrate Arbor Day by planning to add trees. Follow these guidelines to ensure trees get off to a good start.

Start by selecting trees that match the site conditions in which they will grow. Trees are a major investment so do some research. Choose vigorous stock with good form and trunks free of wounds. Root balls should be solid. Container stock should not have roots growing in a circle. Roots should be white or light tan.

Preparing proper planting holes is critical. Ideally make planting holes 2 to 3 times the width of the root ball. Roughen the sides, especially on clay soils. Proper planting depth is about the same the tree was growing at the nursery. To help determine this, look closely for the natural trunk flare above the soil surface and primary roots should be 1 to 3 inches below the soil surface. Avoid digging holes too deep and refilling, as tree root balls often settle after planting.



Containers should be removed before planting and roots inspected. Cut any circling roots. Burlap, twine, and wire associated with wrapped root balls (balled & burlap stock) should be carefully cut away after trees are secure in the planting hole. Oftentimes there is misinformation on handling soil being put back into planting holes. Return the same soil that was removed. Do not heavily amend backfill with organic material as water movement will be impeded. Avoid putting gravel, sand, or fertilizer in the bottom of the hole. Lightly tamp or use water to settle air pockets as soil is placed back in the hole.

Mulch the root zone after planting. Keep mulch away from direct contact with the trunk and do not make a “mulch volcano” around trees. Water thoroughly after planting and then as needed to avoid drought stress. Do not fertilize for at least one full year, if not longer.

If necessary, staking should only be done for the shortest time needed. Staking trees restricts natural trunk movement that increases trunk taper, which makes trees stronger. If staking, make sure stakes are outside the planting hole and protect bark from rope, twine, or wire. Inspect and readjust as needed.

Wrapping trunks is sometimes called for on trees with smooth tender bark. Use light colored wrap to reflect sun and heat and wrap in a shingle effect. Inspect frequently to ensure the wrap is not too tight. As tree bark naturally roughens with age, wrap can be removed.

Happy Arbor Day!

Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County? Feel free to contact:

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