

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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“Ten Rules for Spring Planting of Trees”

Are you looking to spice up your landscape for the coming years? You can do that by planting some new trees. Here are 10 rules you can follow to make sure your new trees have the best chance of success.

Select the right tree for the site. If you want your new tree to have success you should choose trees that are adapted to your location. If you need help doing this feel free to contact the Extension office for help. Consider whether the tree produces nuisance fruit or if there are disease-resistant varieties available. For example, there are a number of crabapple varieties that are resistant to apple scab and rust diseases. Also consider the mature size of a tree to be sure you have enough room.

Keep the tree well-watered and in a shady location. When moving the tree, lift it by the root ball or pot and not by the trunk.

Before planting, remove all wires, labels, cords or anything else tied to the plant. If left on, they may eventually girdle the branch to which they are attached. The root flare (point where trunk and roots meet) should be visible. If it isn't, remove enough soil or media before planting so that it is.

Dig proper hole. Make the hole deep enough so that the tree sits slightly above nursery level. Plant the tree on solid ground, not fill dirt. In other words, don't dig the hole too deep and then add soil back to the hole before placing the tree. The width of the planting hole is very important. It should be three times the width of the root ball. Loosening the soil outside the hole so it is five times the diameter of the root ball will allow the tree to spread its roots faster.

Remove all containers from the root ball. Cut away plastic and peat pots; roll burlap and wire baskets back into the hole, cutting as much of the excess away as possible. If you can remove the wire basket without disturbing the root ball, do it. If roots have been circling around the container, cut them and fluff them out so they do not continue growing so that they circle inside the hole and become girdling roots later in the life of the tree.

Backfill the hole with the same soil that was removed. Amendments such as peat moss likely do more harm than good. Make sure the soil that goes back is loosened – no clods or clumps. Add water as you fill to ensure good root to soil contact and prevent air pockets. There is no need to fertilize at planting.

Don't cut back the branches of a tree after planting except those that are rubbing or damaged. The leaf buds release a hormone that encourages root growth. If the tree is cut back,

the reduced number of leaf buds results in less hormone released and therefore fewer roots being formed.

Water tree thoroughly. Then, water once a week for the first season if there is insufficient rainfall.

Mulch around the tree. Mulch should be 2-4 inches deep and cover an area 2 to 3 times the diameter of the root ball. Mulching reduces competition from other plants, conserves moisture and keeps soil temperature closer to what the plants' roots prefer.

Stake only when necessary. Trees will establish more quickly and grow faster if they are not staked. However, larger trees or those in windy locations may need to be staked the first year. Movement is necessary for the trunk to become strong. Staking should be designed to limit movement of the root ball rather than immobilize the trunk.

Information comes from K-State University horticulture expert Ward Upham.

For more information regarding upcoming programs, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.