Tree Planting

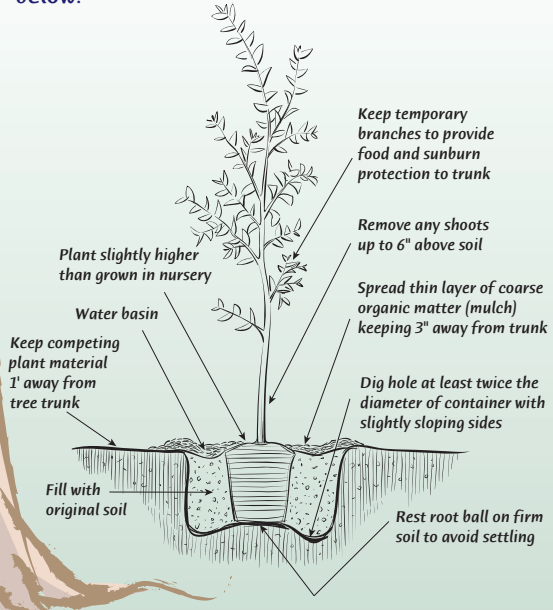
Proper tree planting helps ensure young tree survival.

Fall is the best planting season.

- The soil moisture and temperature are generally favorable.
- Plants will transpire less water due to shorter days and cooler temperatures.
- Roots have more time to develop before warm summer temperatures arrive.

Trees can be planted during other seasons, but are likely to require additional attention. For instance, trees planted in summer will need regular watering until they become established.

Prior to planting, evaluate the site. Identify soil conditions that may limit root development, such as surface compaction or hardpan (a subsurface compact layer). If surface compaction exists, till the soil until it is loose. If hardpan exists, break through the layer using an auger or digging bar to allow water movement and rooting into the soil below.



(continued on reverse)

Prepare the planting hole:

- Be aware of the location of underground utilities and pipes prior to digging.
- Hole should be at least twice the diameter of the root ball and as deep as the root ball. If soil is unfavorable for root growth, dig hole as wide as practical, such as 3-4 times the root ball diameter.
- Plant "high" in all but sandy soils, so top of root ball is 1-2 inches above grade.
- Roughen the sides of the hole with a shovel to aid intermingling of backfill soil with existing soil to provide easier root penetration.

Remove tree from nursery container and cut or shorten matted and circling roots on periphery of root ball.

Place tree into the planting hole on firm soil to avoid settling. Face the crook of a grafted union away from the afternoon sun to reduce sunburn. Once tree is positioned, backfill with original soil. Adding a planter mix or other physical amendment is not necessary except in situations of extremely high sand or clay content, which are rare. Press the backfill soil firmly around the root ball, but do not compact. Do not put fill soil on top of the root ball.

Water thoroughly, paying attention to wetting the container soil and the surrounding soil. Mulch the planted area with coarse organic matter (such as wood chips) to retain soil moisture and control weeds, but do not pile it against trunk.

Irrigation following planting is critically important. Fill the basin at least once a week in spring and fall. In summer, water more frequently if needed. After 1-2 months, irrigation frequency can be reduced, but trees should be monitored carefully for signs of water stress.

Fertilization is not recommended at planting unless a known mineral deficiency exists. Don't plant within a foot of the trunk because lawns and plants compete with young tree roots for water and nutrients and can reduce growth. Avoid damage to the trunk from string trimmers and mowers.

Only minor pruning to remove damaged branches and codominant stems (double leaders) is recommended at planting. Allow branches growing low on trunk to remain, but cut them back. These temporary branches will nourish the trunk and prevent sunburn.

For more information call your local University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners or visit the UCCE California Gardening website http://cagardenweb.ucdavis.edu

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