

Finding a Home for My New Tree

By Jackie Sledge,

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I worked on my landscape plan a few months ago when it was too hot to be outside, and I decided I needed to add a tree and several shrubs to the side yard and the back yard. Last week I found what I wanted at the Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale so now it's time to dig holes and plant.

Before purchasing a tree, I researched landscaping and planting so I would be sure to purchase the correct tree and plant it in the correct place. Here's what I found:

- Fall is the best time to plant trees. Planting between mid-September through November allows the longest time for the tree to establish new roots before summer heat returns.
- Unless you need to fill an area immediately, don't select the tallest, largest tree you can find. Look for a smaller, young tree with a sturdy trunk and well-formed branches. It will cost less, be easier to move and plant, and will adjust to its new home faster than an older, larger tree.
- Plant trees away from the house and from other trees to prevent problems in the future. Neil Sperry recommends planting 15-20 feet from a one-story house, 20-30 feet from a two-story house, and 25-30 feet from other trees.
- Consider how the tree will look outdoors and also check out how it will look from inside the house. You may want to plant it where you can enjoy looking at the tree, or maybe you don't want to plant it where it will obstruct the view of other cultivars in your landscape.
- If you aren't sure how the tree will look in the location you selected, build a dummy tree to help you envision how it will look. Stick a leaf rake through the top of a step ladder and then raise the handle to the correct height. You can move the dummy tree around until you find the correct location for the new tree.
- Dig the hole for planting the tree. The hole is usually large enough if it is twice as wide as and no deeper than the root-ball. The wider the hole is, the better the tree will grow. The top of the root-ball should be slightly higher than the surrounding soil.
- There is usually a little irregularity in the shape of a tree. Once you've set the tree in the hole, step back and see how it looks. Adjust the tree as needed to ensure that the best side or position is what you see before you fill the hole with soil.
- Use the soil you dug to make the hole for the tree to backfill around the tree. Do not add soil amendments such as compost, peat moss, or shredded bark to the backfill. Step firmly around the newly planted tree to eliminate air pockets and ensure firm contact between the nursery soil and the backfill soil.
- Use the soil left after the tree has been planted to create a doughnut-shaped berm around the hole. Fill the berm with mulch to help reduce water runoff, help retain moisture, moderate soil temperature, and suppress weeds. Be sure to start the mulch about 6 inches away from the trunk.

- The tree I bought is container-grown so the roots should be intact when it is planted. The soil in containers is usually a lightweight soil mix so a newly planted tree needs more frequent watering. Fill the berm basin with water after the tree has been planted. Water with one pint to one quart of water every day for a week, and then water with one to two quarts of water every other day during the second week. During the third week water with two to three quarts of water every third day. Beginning with the fourth week water once a week as needed until the tree can survive on rainwater only. Another source recommends hand-watering a newly planted tree every day or two for the first couple of summers after it is planted because watering with just the sprinkler system is not sufficient during the hot weather.
- It is not necessary to always depend on a watering schedule. Use your index finger to check the soil moisture under the mulch. If the soil is cool to the touch, do not water. If it is warm and dry, the tree needs to be watered.

I learned a few things about tree roots when I was doing the research, and I need to remember them as my new tree grows:

- Most of the tree's roots are in the top foot of soil. The taproot is for support, and not to search for water.
- The tree's roots grow larger as the tree grows – just as the trunk grows larger. The tree's roots may grow to the point that they are above the soil, and this is normal. Don't add soil to try to conceal these roots.
- Roots can cause structural damage to concrete slab foundations, sidewalks, driveways, patios, and porches. If this happens, the root or roots causing the problem may need to be removed.

There is a lot involved when selecting and planting a tree. I plan on getting my new tree in the ground this week, and then I will research and prepare to plant the shrubs. I'll share that information with you later.

If you have any questions, call the Taylor County Extension Office at 325-672-6048 or email us at mgardeners@yahoo.com. We hope you will visit bcmgtx.org for all Big Country Master Gardener information and events, like us on BCMGA Facebook, and check out training presentations on BCMGA YouTube. We are here to help you!