

## **Yard and Garden 04-09-2011 -- Ted Griess/ Extension Horticulture Assistant**

I often reference the phrase *window of opportunity*. Did you know that the *window of opportunity* for planting trees and shrubs just opened? It will remain open until the end of June. Then, beginning July 1st, the window temporarily closes until September 1<sup>st</sup>, when it again reopens. With moderate air temperatures and workable soil, spring provides ideal conditions for newly planted trees to develop a quality root system and to become well established before the heat of summer arrives.

One can find trees and shrubs available as bare root, balled and burlapped, or container grown.

Bare root trees and shrubs have the shortest window of opportunity for planting. They are normally planted in early spring while the plants remain dormant. Bare root plants have had the soil washed or shaken from their roots. Because they lack a rooting media, they must be stored in a dormant state at temperatures slightly above freezing and at a high humidity level. Nurseries generally ship bare root trees with the roots wrapped in dampened material such as sphagnum or newspapers, then placed in a plastic bag and packaged in a cardboard box. As a result, bare root plants should be planted the same day they arrive or as soon as possible thereafter. Upon receiving the plants, inspect them immediately to ensure they are healthy and undamaged. It is essential the packing material remains moist. After inspection, one may need to moisten again the packing material and store the trees in a cold environment until conditions are favorable for planting. Prior to planting, rehydrate the plants by soaking them in a bucket of water for a couple hours.

Balled and burlapped, commonly called B&B, as well as container grown trees and shrubs have the longest window of opportunity for successful planting. Their window runs from late April through the end of June. Be careful when planting prior to the last spring frost date, which is usually May 10th. You may need to provide protection if heavy frost is predicted to avoid damaging living leaf tissue. To minimize stress on the plants, attempt to plant on a calm, cloudy day ensuring the plants remain moist during the planting process.

It is best to plant directly into the native soil, without adding any soil amendments. New roots tend to stay within the area of the amended soil rather than spreading out.

When planting any tree, one of the most important considerations is planting it at the correct depth. Roots get oxygen from the soil. If planted too deeply, the roots suffer from the lack of oxygen. Thus, the tree may not adequately develop. It may be more prone to insect and disease damage.

To determine the proper planting depth, first locate the root flare. To do so, one may need to remove some of the top soil from the root ball. The root flare is the area where the trunk of the tree widens just before the first main root appears. When planted properly, the tree's root flare should be visible at the soil surface after planting. See the image provided by the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.

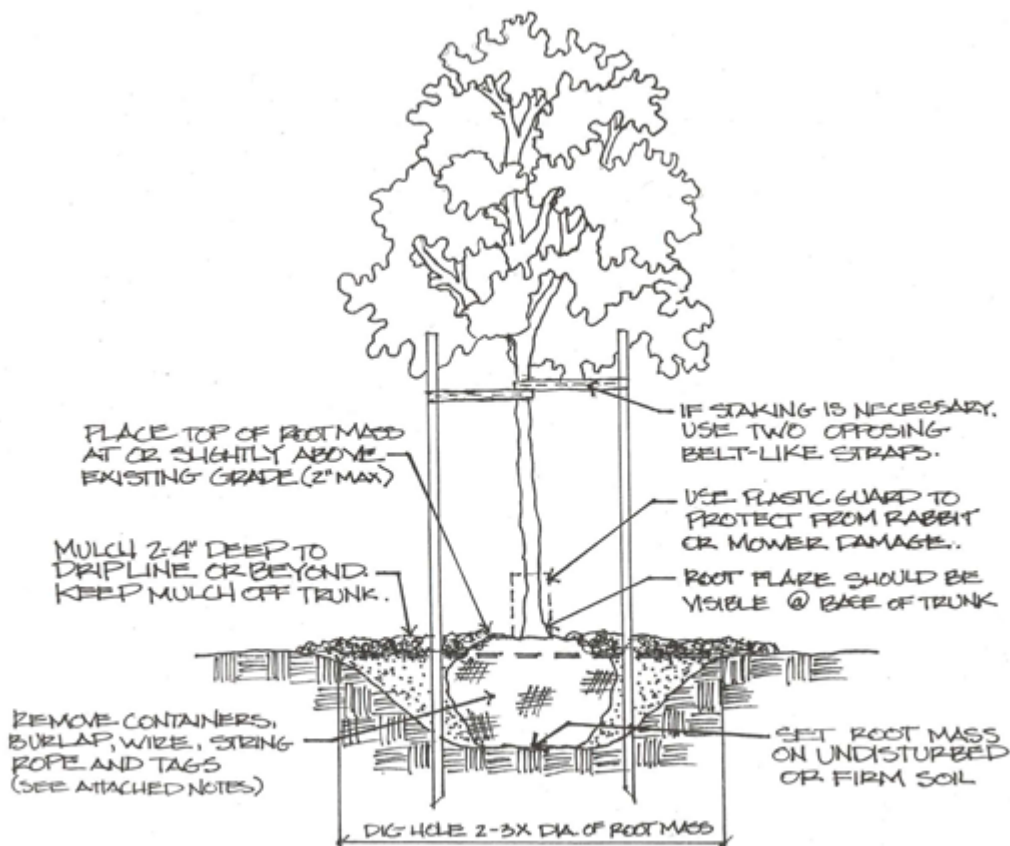
Avoid digging deeper than necessary. If the soil is too loose, it will settle after the tree has been planted causing the tree to sink. A wide hole is best, loosening the soil around the edges to promote root penetration into the surrounding area.

Remove any burlap, plastic containers, or wire baskets from the root ball before planting. Once the root ball is properly placed in the hole gently backfill while firming the soil around the root ball. After backfilling, apply water to eliminate any remaining air pockets.

Lastly, apply a two to three inch layer of organic mulch, such as wood chips at the base of the tree reaching out to the drip line. The drip line is the area just beneath the outer most branches of the tree. Avoid having the mulch make contact with the trunk of the tree.

Staking trees is generally not necessary unless the tree is exposed to a windy location.

While the window of opportunity stands wide open, now is a perfect time to plant trees.



TYPICAL TREE PLANTING DETAIL  
(NO SCALE)