

**Ag Column**  
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## **Plan Before Planting**

Trees and shrubs add value to your landscape when they are properly selected, planted, and maintained. Consider planting a tree or shrub this year in your landscape.

UT Extension and VA Tech Extension have publications available to help you plan for a great landscape. You should establish what space you have available and consult a tree and shrub publication. UT Extension has a series called Trees for Tennessee with pictures, descriptions, and the expected mature size. Your newly planted landscape will look like you need additional plants, but please be patient. You'll need to allow 5 to 7 years for a landscape to grow to an optimum size and begin to look good. Planning before planting will help avoid an overgrown and crowded landscape.

Do you want an evergreen or a deciduous tree? Do you want a flowering tree or a tree that produces nuts and berries for wildlife? You can also select trees based on leaf color.

Next, you will want to consider the available sunlight and soil type of your planting site. Trees will have different requirements for light and soil drainage.

Dr. Wayne Clatterbuck, UT Extension Forester, suggests avoiding trees such as silver maple, Bradford pear, Lombardy poplar, Leyland cypress, and Siberian elm. These trees have been known to be sources of problems for homeowners.

Your new tree will have the best chance of survival when it is planted during the dormant season. You should avoid planting trees or shrubs when the soils are frozen. Clatterbuck suggests planting during November through March.

The quality of planting job may determine how well your tree adjusts and grows in its new environment. The hole should be two to three times as large as the root ball of the tree, but not any deeper than the height of the root ball. Loose soil under the root ball can allow a heavy tree to sink resulting in a tree planted too deep. This will provide good loose soil for the tree's roots to expand. Use the native soil to backfill. This helps eliminate the chance of circling roots and a stressed tree.

Keep in mind that clay soil will be poorly drained. Planting a tree or shrub in this type of soil may require planting the soil above the soil line and then adding soil around the root system. This will improve drainage allowing the tree's roots to breathe. You should also make sure you remove the burlap and any wire material. Before backfilling, make sure you score the root ball to encourage the roots to grow outward.

Clatterbuck suggests watering twice a week or as needed to maintain soil in a moist condition, but do not overwater. Mulch the area around newly planted shade trees, but do not allow the mulch to touch the tree. Mulch helps to control weeds, conserves moisture, adds nutrients as mulch breaks down and protects trees from lawnmowers and string trimmers.