

## **Now is a Good Time to Plant a Tree**

**By Chris Ramsey, Sullivan County Extension Agent**

Fall is a great time to add a new tree to your lawn especially bare root trees as well as ball and burlap trees. Planting ball and burlap trees now helps the tree over the shock of being dug up leaving major portion of the root system in the field. This puts the tree at a disadvantage compared to a tree grown in a container.

Container trees may actually be planted any time of the year as long the ground is not frozen. When planting a container tree, all of the tree's root system goes into the planting hole to help it become established. Planting container trees in the dormant season is recommended due to the lower water requirement of the season.

Now that you have decided to plant a tree, make sure you are planting the right tree in the right place. In other words, do you know what the mature size of the tree will be? Many native trees can grow to heights of 60 to 80 feet with a limb spread of 40 to 50 feet. So, don't be misled by that small four-foot Hemlock. University of Tennessee (UT) Extension has a series of publications listing trees, their characteristics and mature sizes including a list of trees that can be planted under power lines. There is also a publication to help you select a particular tree for fall color, spring blooming or summer blooming.

When purchasing a tree, inspect it for wounds on the trunk. You should also look for correct form and avoid co-dominant stems. A tree that splits into two trunks at a low height will be a weak tree in the future.

When you remove the container from the tree, inspect the root ball for circling roots. Any circling roots should be cut to encourage the tree to initiate new roots. Circling roots can eventually girdle the trunk.

Now, dig a hole three times as large as the root ball to give the tree ample loose soil to develop roots. Make sure the sides of the planting hole are not sealed, especially in heavy clay soils. According to the UT Extension Forestry Specialists, the two most common mistakes in transplanting trees is planting them too deeply and over or under watering.

The top of the root ball should be planted at ground level or above. Larger trees will be more likely to settle due to the weight of the root ball causing ponding of water around the base of the tree.

Slightly pulling the root ball apart will encourage the roots to move out into the new soil. You can also score the root ball with a sharp blade. Make sure to place the tree in the hole in the correct position before back filling. The position will be hard to change after planting. If a ball and burlap tree is being planted, be sure to remove the burlap from the sides of the root ball.

Fill the hole about half full around the tree with the original soil and then lightly pack the soil around the root ball and water to eliminate air pockets. Continue filling the hole around the tree. Be sure to water thoroughly after planting.

Place two to four inches of mulch around the tree. Mulch should not contact the trunk as this can promote pest problems including rodent damage.

Pay close attention to watering of the tree for several months after planting. A good rule of thumb is to provide about one third the volume of the original container in water. A three-gallon tree would receive about one gallon of water. Monitor soil moisture as

trees can be kept too wet especially in a clay soil. A newly planted tree will require two years to become established.

### **Resources**

Native Trees for Tennessee

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP515.pdf>

Guidelines for Buying Trees

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP662.pdf>

Trees to Plant Under Power Lines

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP611.pdf>

Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP511.pdf>

Small Flowering Trees for Tennessee Landscapes

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP513.pdf>

Small Trees for Fall Splendor

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP514.pdf>

Watering Trees

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP682.pdf>

Mulching Your Trees and Landscape

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP617.pdf>

Post-Planting Tree Care: Fallacies and Recommendations

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/Sp574.pdf>

### **How do I ask a question?**

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

*The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.*