Tree Basics:
Tree Selection, Planting and Care

Tim Maywalt
October 19, 2021
Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards
www.charlottesvilleareatreeestewards.org

Where to find these slides:
https://www.charlottesvilleareatreeestewards.org/learn-about-trees/take-a-tree-steward-class/
Overview

• Right Tree/Right Place
  – Match the tree you choose to the place you plant it

• Root preparation

• Planting process

• Tree Care
Right Tree Right Place

- Space (mature tree size)
- Sun/shade exposure
- Overhead utility lines
- Moisture
- Hardiness
- Soil (http://www.soiltest.vt.edu)
- *Call VA811.com (Miss Utility) before you dig*
## Right Tree/Right Place Tree List

Compiled by Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards from many sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Botanic name</th>
<th>Evergreen</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Spread</th>
<th>Crown Form</th>
<th>Hardiness zone</th>
<th>Heat zone</th>
<th>Light conditions</th>
<th>Soil conditions</th>
<th>Drought tolerant</th>
<th>Air pollution tolerant</th>
<th>Salt tolerant</th>
<th>Fruit/fruit producing</th>
<th># of caterpillar species</th>
<th>Suitable landscape locations</th>
<th>Buffers, riparian, streets, parks, lawns, gardens, and rain gardens</th>
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Planting a Tree
Planting Overview

- Bare rooting
- Setting the level
- The hole
- Planting:
  - Bare root trees
  - Container trees
  - Ballved and burlapped trees
  - Replanting (moving a tree)
Best Time to Plant

- For most deciduous trees late fall is best - after it goes dormant and its leaves fall off - November/December

- Some species do better with spring planting
  - Black gum; southern magnolia, river birch and all oaks except Pin oak

- If planting in spring, do it in EARLY spring (March)
  -- Trees need time to acclimate before the heat of summer

- Conifers are OK to plant in early spring or late fall

- Most of the examples here are deciduous
Nursery Stock Types

Bare Root

Ball and Burlap (B&B)

Container

Chew Valley Trees

Johnsons Nursery

Nursery Management
Forms: Pros and Cons

**Pros**

- **Bare Root**
  - Root mass intact, easier handling, smaller hole, less transplant shock, fastest growing, lowest cost

- **Container**
  - Easy to find, wide selection, moderate cost, not too heavy, root mass intact, less transplant shock than B&B

- **B&B**
  - No size limit, wide selection, only option for large trees

**Cons**

- **Bare Root**
  - Narrow selection, limited sources, roots exposed, plant right away or heel in

- **Container**
  - Worst root problems

- **B&B**
  - Hard to handle, need big hole, most of root mass lost, slow to establish, costly
Tree Form and Roots

- Bare root - all of tree is visible – above and below the surface
- Container or B&B – can’t see roots, usually can’t see root collar
- What's not visible is as important to see as what's visible
- Roots are exposed through process called bare rooting
- Bare rooting removes soil or potting medium from roots
- Ideally, need to reveal the entire root structure, but at least the top two to three inches to see root collar (to establish depth of hole) and topmost roots where most root problems are found
Bare Rooting

- Bare rooting involves removing the native soil from field-grown trees or potting medium from container trees

- **Purpose:**
  - reveal the root collar (often buried)
  - inspect roots for problems needing correction
  - keep potting medium out of hole
  - allow roots to spread out and grow naturally
Find the Root Collar

- Ideally, find the root collar before you dig the hole
- Remove soil/potting medium exposing the root collar allowing accurate measure of hole depth
- Measure distance from root collar to bottom of root mass (push up gently on bottom of root mass to determine actual bottom)
- Start with shallow hole and deepen as needed
- If the hole is too deep, backfill and compact the new bottom

Coles Plant Center
Setting the Level

Plant It Above Grade (Ground Level) to Accommodate Settling

Arbor Day Foundation
Level Not Correct

Too low – trunk and root collar buried

Too high – roots exposed

Effects of burying the trunk:
- Bark deterioration
- Development of adventitious roots which can become girdling roots
- Reduced oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange at a critical site
If You Don’t Want to Bare Root It, at Least Expose the Root Collar

- **B&B Trees**: loose soil buries root collar when burlap is secured around trunk
- **Container Trees**: new soil added as trees are moved to larger containers gradually buries the root collar
- Take off at least enough soil to see root collar and expose root problems at top of root ball
- Remove wire cage and burlap
Minimum Root Preparation Needed
Expose root collar and top of root structure
Burlap needs to be removed – it’s not always biodegradable.

Wire cage needs to be removed or it can damage roots and trunk.
The Hole

• Who will be digging the holes?

• When will they be dug?

• How are they being dug?

• How much shaping/finishing will be needed?
Digging Methods

Clockwise:
Pick and shovel
Auger
Backhoe
Stump grinder
Digging Method
Pros and Cons

- Pick and shovel – hard work but maximum control
- Stump grinder – cost, some access issues but finely divides soil for better contact with roots
- Auger – cost, hole often too deep and with glazed, vertical sides requiring reshaping and scoring
- Backhoe – cost, access issues, hole will usually need to be reshaped
Preparing the Hole

- Two or three times wider than roots, not deeper
- Start shallow
- If too deep, backfill and compact bottom
- Slope the sides (wider at top than bottom)
- Keep turf out of hole (use for basin walls)
- Break up soil in small pieces to avoid air pockets
- Score hole sides for easier root penetration
- Dig into hole sides to fit long roots
- If roots are loose, build mound for support
  - Protect mound when backfilling
- Call Miss Utility before digging: #811
Hole Preparation When Planting on a Slope

Create a planting shelf or terrace by digging into the uphill side of the hole and depositing soil on the downhill side.

Use soil to create a berm on the downhill edge of the hole to hold water.

If the slope is very steep, reinforce the downhill side with stone.
Planting Bare Root Trees
Bare Root Trees Are Ready to Plant

Unlike container and B&B trees, they don’t need extensive root preparation.

If shipped to you, their roots are usually covered in hydrogel to keep them moist until arrival.

Arborday Foundation

Chew Valley Trees

lakenlong.com
If Not Planting Right Away They Need To Be Heeled In

Heeling in involves covering the roots with soil temporarily before permanent planting in order to protect the roots from exposure.

Dig a shallow trench and use loose soil to cover the roots.

Water regularly until planted.

Plant as soon as possible.
Planting a Bare Root Tree With Loose Roots

- Build a mound at bottom of hole
- Drape roots over mound pointing outward radially
- Hole can be shallow – about 12 inches is usually adequate (use root collar for measurement)
- Hole width – two or three times the width of the root ball
- Hole shape should be concave, i.e., sides should be sloped
Drape roots over mound - otherwise they will be forced downward as you backfill
Planting a Bare Root Tree With Stiff Roots

- Mound not needed for support
- Measure from root collar to bottom of lowest root to determine hole depth
- Hole width – two or three times the width of the root ball
- Hole shape should be concave, i.e., sides should be sloped

Note: two problems with planting shown in this photo – first, hole is too small – should be a foot or more wider all around; second, it’s too deep – root collar needs to be higher to accommodate settling.
Identifying Root Problems Before Planting

Circling and girdling roots – they never grow outward and can eventually strangle the trunk killing the tree.
Circling Roots on a Mature Tree
Circling Roots Can Become Girdling Roots As Tree Matures
Removing a Girdling Root at Planting

1. Initial step: Identify and mark the girdling root
2. Carefully cut around the girdling root
3. Remove the girdling root completely
4. Ensure the root is clean and ready for planting
Roots Pruning
Planting a Container Tree

Container trees are planted in potting medium, not soil. Potting medium is mulch – usually ground pine bark, sand and fertilizer – don’t get it in your hole when planting.
Bare Rooting a Container Tree

From this

To this
Typical Container Tree Root Balls

ag.colorado.gov
Preparing a Container Tree for Planting

- Remove tree from container
- Expose the root collar
- Loosen roots and spread them out
- Remove as much potting medium as possible (save it for mulching)
- Prune roots as needed
Container Tree
Root Preparation
Planting a B&B Tree

B&B trees are heavy – 250-500 lbs. – and hard to handle with their roots surrounded by native soil from the field where they were grown.
Bare Rooting a B&B Tree

After removing the wire cage, twine and burlap, you have this

After removing soil, you have this

Root problems can be identified and corrected, then you are ready to plant

Planting video will show the bare rooting process in more detail
Tree Spade
Removing a Tree
After the tree spade removes it from the ground, the root ball is lowered into a wire cage lined with burlap and secured for shipping.
Bare Rooting at the Nursery
B&B Problem: Much of Root Mass Lost

90% of root system left behind when B&B trees are harvested
Transplanting a Tree

Why?

- Moving a forest tree to a landscape
- A tree may be at risk of being damaged or lost during construction or other work
- Property owners may change their mind about their choice of site
Transplant Procedure

- Make a circular cut around the root ball
  - For a 1-2 in. caliper tree, cut at about 16-18 inches from trunk
  - Ideally, also do this in the spring before transplanting in the fall (this will force new root growth that will help the tree succeed when moved)

- Insert two or three shovels close to each other under the root ball and gently pry upward

- Move the shovels around the root ball and repeat gentle prying

- Once loosened all around, lift the tree onto a tarp

- Usually we don’t bare root a transplant tree – if it is growing successfully, it is unlikely to have major root problems and any such problem should be visible upon inspection once out of hole
Transplant Procedure Cont’d

- Measure the root ball and dig the new hole to those dimensions
  - Start with the hole a little shallow rather than too deep
  - If root penetration problems are anticipated, dig the hole wider than the root ball
  - Scour the inside surfaces of the hole to ease root penetration
  - Expose the root collar if it is not visible in order to set the level
Transplant Procedure Cont’d

- Place the tree in the hole to check for fit using the root collar to establish correct depth and reshape the hole as needed

- Settling shouldn’t be a problem unless the hole was dug too deep and you had to backfill.

- Backfill and create slurries as shown in the B&B video

- Mulch and provide deer protection as shown in the video
Use a long, narrow bladed spade, e.g., a drain spade, to cut a circle around the root ball 14-16 inches deep cutting straight downward.

Gently lift root ball moving around the cut circle until it comes loose.
Place the root ball on a tarp to move it. Cover to protect it from wind and sun and save the soil from the hole.

Bare rooting is not needed for transplants - the new hole should only be slightly wider/deeper than the root ball.
Tree Care
Tree Care

- Watering (get a rain gauge and a soil moisture meter)
- Mulching
- Deer protection
- Pruning
- Avoiding soil compaction
- Attaching things to trees
- Protection from construction damage
- Check tree health
- Getting help
  - CooperativeExtension/Arborists
  - International Society of Arboriculture: https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist
Tree Care cont’d

• Attaching things to trees

• Protection from construction damage

• Checking tree health

• Getting help – CooperativeExtension/Arborists
Water Bags ("Gator" Bags)

For single-trunk trees

For multi-trunk trees

Photos by GatorBags
Water Bag (gator bag)

- Small perforations – water releases slowly
- Only waters what is directly below it
- Use for first growing season
- Take off at end of growing season (provides shelter over winter for critters that eat bark)
- No longer useful once tree crown is wider than bag
Mulching 3-3-3 Rule

Not more than 3 inches deep

No mulch within 3 inches of trunk

Extend outward at least 3 feet

Increase coverage as canopy widens
Volcano Mulching - Easy to Fix

Bark rot from direct contact with mulch
Wood Chips

Wood chips are ideal for mulching:

Inexpensive/often free

All-natural fertilizer

Long-lasting

Slowly release nutrients into soil

Chunky, so it lets water through to roots
Deer rubbing damages or breaks young trees – use deer protection
Tree Tubes and Cages

Wilson Forestry Supply

MIgardener
Attaching Things to Trees
Construction Damage

Roots cut by grading, soil compacted by piling spoil & storing construction materials
Tree Roots Are Wide and Shallow
Construction

Photos by ArborCare
Give a Child a Lifetime Gift

I loved planting the tree.

It was so fun!

-Cam
Good Luck!

Eric Busch