

Ten Tree Planting Rules

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Introduction

The future health of a tree is dependent on proper care at planting time. The following 10 rules sum up the important steps in tree planting.

Rule 1 -- Select the right tree for the site. It is important to match your planting site and its conditions with a tree species' shade, moisture, and soil preferences.

Rule 2 -- Provide good pre-planting care. Keep trees shaded, cool, and moist before planting. Be gentle when handling the root ball.

Rule 3 -- Remove all labels, wires, etc. from the tree's stem.

Rule 4 -- Dig a shallow hole, as wide as possible. The hole should be at least 3X the root ball diameter, bowl-shaped, and as deep as the root ball is high or 1-2" shallower. The root ball should be placed on undisturbed soil, with the root collar at or just above the level of the surrounding soil. On a poorly-drained, compacted, or wet site, leave at least 1/3 of the root ball above grade and mound backfill up to the root collar.

Rule 5 -- Remove burlap, pots, wire baskets, etc. from the root ball. Removing these materials with the root ball in the hole minimizes root system disturbance. Wire baskets can be cut and pulled away in pieces. If you can't remove burlap because the ball is loose, at least slit and peel it back below the soil surface.

Rule 6 -- Backfill with native soil--no amendments. Don't mix in organic matter, fertilizer, sand, etc. Only add organic matter like peat moss (up to 25% of soil volume mixed in thoroughly) if you have a very poor soil (clay sub-soil, rock).

Rule 7 -- Do not fertilize for 1-2 years or cut back crown. Fertilizer at planting time stimulates root rots. Prune dead, broken, or poorly placed branches or double leaders. Don't cut back healthy, live branches to reduce the crown.

Rule 8 -- Water. Water the entire root zone about once a week for the first year or two. Do not water-log soil. Most of the tree's roots are within the top 6-12" of the soil, so apply water at a slow rate to the soil surface--don't inject it with a water lance.

Rule 9 -- Mulch. The most important thing you can do for any tree, next to watering, is applying an organic matter mulch (chips, clippings, bark, etc.) at a 2-4" depth over much of the tree's root zone. Start with a circle of mulch 3X root ball diameter and extend it as the tree grows. The wider the area the better. This reduces compaction, keeps mowers away, eliminates grass competition, and keeps the soil cooler and moister.

Rule 10 -- Wrap and stake only if necessary. Only wrap a tree's stem if sun hits its trunk in winter. Overlap paper wrap from the bottom up. Leave wrap on only in the winter for 1 or 2 seasons. Stake a tree if it is large and will catch wind, or if it is very small and might be trampled. Stake loosely, using carpet strips, canvas straps, etc., and remove stakes after 1-2 years.

Updated: 3/12/03

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More Information

Selecting the Right Tree

The USU Tree Browser is an interactive database containing information on 241 native and introduced trees growing in Utah and the Intermountain West. Users can browse through a complete list of trees or narrow their choices by selecting from 21 general, growth-related, cultural, and ornamental characteristics. For each species there is a fact sheet, general comments about the tree's native habitat, and a description of its uses in cultivated landscapes, including its USDA Plant Hardiness Zone designation.

http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/HomeTown/Select_TreeBrowser.htm

Publications on Tree Planting

Use the link below for the following articles

http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/HomeTown/HO_Planting.htm

Planting Landscape Trees

This fact sheet covers the basics of landscape tree planting including tree types, details of planting procedures, and post-planting care. Problems associated with buried root collars are discussed.

Planting Trees? Dig Big!

Tips on digging wide, shallow holes to help newly planted trees establish successfully.

Do I remove root ball packing materials?

A summary of experts' opinions on removing root ball packing materials.