Tree Planting

While under drought conditions is not the ideal time to plant trees, it will begin to rain and the temperatures will return to normal sometime soon – I hope. So save this article as a reference. We have been losing many trees to the drought, so when the time comes to replacing them keep these guidelines handy.

There are three types of planting stock you can purchase:bare-root, balled and burlap (B&B), and containerized. Bare root seedlings are generally small, one year old plants. They come without soil and are best to plant during the dormant season. Balled and burlap trees have been dug out of the ground from a site. They are generally larger plants with most of the roots left at the original growing location. These B&B trees must also be planted during the dormant season for best results, since the tree needs to grow a new root system in order to get established, which can take up to several years. Containerized plants and trees come with their entire root system intact, so technically they can be planted all year long. Containerized trees can catch up to B&B trees, so unless you need an instant landscape, it may be smarter and cheaper to get containerized material.

Choose the Right Tree In an earlier article, we talked about the importance of selecting a native species that will not outgrow the space when it matures. Also, choose one that is well adapted to our soils and is drought hardy.

Dig the hole at least three times as wide as the root ball. The wider the planting area, the better. Do not dig deeper than the height of the root ball. The root ball should lie in the bottom of the hole with the root ball on the ground and end up at, or slightly above the ground level when planted.

Remove the tree from the container carefully. Do not lift the tree by the trunk. Make sure there are no circling roots that have formed around the inside of the container. If you find circling (or girdling roots as they are sometimes known), pull them apart.

Plant the tree using the existing soil from the hole. It is not recommended to use more than 25% of compost mixed in with the backfill. If you use sand or pure potting soil or compost as a substitute for the original soil, you will end up with drainage problems or create what is known as the “bathtub effect” and possibly kill the new seedlings.

Fill in the hole with out compacting the soil with your boot. Use water to settle the soil around the roots instead so as not to damage the roots. Make sure that you have not planted the tree too deep or that there is no possibility that it will settle. Look for the top of the first major root in the ball. This should be at the surface of the ground line.

Add mulch or wood chips around the newly planted tree. It should be placed about 18 inches around the trunk at a depth of about three inches. Do not let the mulch

accumulate deeply against the bark of the trunk, as this could create moisture problems that can lead to trunk rot. Rewater the tree.

Protect the tree from deer with a cage if you are planting in the unfenced area of your front yard. You can easily make a cage with 2" X 4" welded wire fencing. You can get a 50 X 4 foot roll at local hardware stores. Cut a ten foot section and make a three foot diameter cage to surround the tree. You can cinch the cage down by hammering two or three **J** shaped pieces of rebar into the ground over the bottom wire. Usually there is no need to stake the tree. But if you must, do not over tighten and plan on removing the guys after one year so they do not end up girdling the trunk.

Water the tree using Mark Petersons 3-2-1 rule. That is, water 3 times per week for the first month, 2 times per week during the second month and one time per week during the third month. Apply one gallon per caliper inch of tree trunk diameter per watering event. Completely cover the entire root ball initially. Then, as the new roots begin to spread out over the next months, water the entire planting area. You may need several supplemental waterings during the summer if we do not get rains.