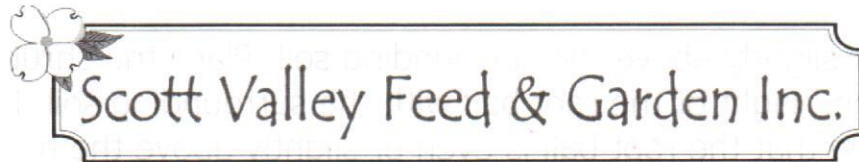


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Passionate for Pets, Plants & People

## Trees & Shrubs

Before you grip your favorite shovel, read these "7 Basic Rules of Properly Planting Shrubs and Trees"

1. Select the right location. When considering the placement of a favorite shrub or tree, remember the real estate agents mantra:

location, location, location. The right location can lead to success or failure. Sun-loving trees require at least 6 hours of direct sun a day. Shade-loving shrubs will tolerate less than 2 hours of direct afternoon sun, and thrive in a location that provides filtered sun.

Also, pay attention to drainage. In general, plants prefer well-drained soils. If you have some areas of your garden that tend to be on the wet side, otherwise known as "hog wallows," then choose shrubs and trees that are adapted to those boggy conditions, such as anisetree (*Illicium* species), Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), and river birch (*Betula nigra*).

2. Dig a wide, shallow hole. Once you've matched the tree to the site, it's time to dig. Dig a hole that is at least two to three times the diameter of the root ball, but no deeper than the height of the root ball. Roots will grow quickly into the loosened soil and will speed up the tree's establishment into its new home.

For shrubs, dig similar sized holes or rototill an entire bed and then dig the hole slightly wider than the root ball but not deeper than the height of the root ball. Remember: trees and shrubs normally produce roots that grow horizontally, so dig a hole as deep as the root ball and as wide as possible.

3. Prepare the root ball. Shrubs and trees growing in plastic or other hard-sided containers may have white roots circling around the outside of the root ball. To prevent these circling roots from eventually choking your shrub or tree, redirect their growth laterally into the surrounding soil. To do this, take a knife, pruning shears, or the end of a sharp spade and lightly score the root ball in three or four places. Make shallow cuts from the top to the bottom of the root ball. Gently tease the sides of the root ball apart. Now, this "doctored" shrub or tree will produce new roots from these cuts all around the root ball.

4. Plant even with or slightly above the surrounding soil. Place the shrub or tree into the hole and measure the height of the root ball with the surrounding soil. Lay your shovel across the hole to see that the root ball is even or slightly above the handle. If the hole is too deep, put some soil on the bottom of the hole, tamp it down with your feet to give the plant some solid footing, and put the plant back in the hole.

Once the shrub or tree is in place, start backfilling--returning the soil into the planting hole. Lightly firm the soil around the root ball with your hands, but not so heavily that you compact the soil. When half of the root ball is covered, water the backfill to settle out any air pockets and remoisten the soil in the root ball. Finish backfilling and water again. Do not cover the top of the root ball with soil. Place mulch on top of the root ball.

5. Mulch. Apply a two to three inch layer of mulch such as compost, leaf litter, shredded wood, or pine straw. Mulch conserves soil moisture, protects the roots from hot and cold, and suppresses weeds. Create a mulch layer that extends to the outermost reaches of the branches. Also, maintain a space of a few inches between the mulch and trunk to keep the bark dry and to discourage rodent feeding.

6. Limit pruning to only broken, dead or diseased branches. Any corrective pruning can be conducted after a full season of growth in the new location.

7. Water frequently. Water--not fertilizer--is the most important ingredient for helping shrubs and trees get established in the landscape. Avoid two common mistakes: over- and underwatering. Keep the soil moist, but not sopping wet.

A few weeks after planting, start cutting back on watering to every few days or longer, especially with cloudy, rainy, or cool weather. Eventually water on a weekly or "as needed" basis by testing the soil and rootball for moisture.

