

Pensacola News Journal
for: Sunday, Nov. 19, 2000
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Ideal Time for Planting Trees and Shrubs

The roots of woody shrubs and trees continue to grow during the winter in the deep south. This makes fall an ideal time for planting. If transplanted during November or December, the plants have 5 or 6 months to begin establishing roots at the new planting site before June and the arrival of hot weather.

Most trees and shrubs are now offered as container grown plants. Though this method of growing has made for easier handling and planting, establishment is still not foolproof. Following are some guidelines that will help to ensure success with planting projects.

- ✍ Choose healthy plants with good structure. Do not purchase trees with main double leaders or with branches that are clustered together on the trunk.
- ✍ The root system of a container grown plant should be well established so that the root ball stays intact when the container is removed. However, the plant should not be root-bound or have roots protruding outside the container or penetrating into the ground.
- ✍ Although cutting or breaking up the root mass during planting has been recommended in the past, there is no strong scientific evidence to support the benefit of this practice. It is better not to invest money or effort in a root-bound plant.
- ✍ Do not prune away any of the top portion of trees and shrubs when transplanting. Recent studies have revealed that the some auxins, or chemicals that help to stimulate root growth, are located in branch tips. Allow new plants to grow for several months before any major pruning is done. Allow trees a full growing season before pruning.
- ✍ When planting a tree or a free standing shrub specimen in the yard, no soil amendments are recommended. The age old practice of placing manure, peat or compost in the planting hole can be detrimental, rather than helpful in the long term.
- ✍ When preparing beds for mass plantings of shrubs, soil amendments can be helpful.

However, they should be spread evenly over the entire bed and tilled to mix with the existing soil, not placed in the planting hole.

✍ Dig planting holes a foot wider, but no deeper than the root ball and set each tree or shrub so that it is no deeper than the surrounding soil surface when planting is finished.

✍ Do not pile excess soil around the base of a plant. Use any soil that is left over to construct a circular ridge just outside of the edge of the root ball. This will act as a basin and aid in the frequent waterings that are needed until plants are well established.

✍ Slow, deep and frequent watering is needed for the first few weeks, or even months when starting larger shrubs and trees. Don't count on the lawn sprinkler system to deliver enough water during this stage. The amount, and frequency that is optimum for turf is usually not enough to establish new trees and shrubs.

✍ Once planted, the surface of mass beds should be mulched at a 2 to 3 inch depth with coarse, undecomposed materials such as pine needles or bark. Individual trees should be mulched at the same depth, with the area covered extending one foot from the base for each inch of trunk diameter.

✍ Light fertilization can be helpful, but for the first few weeks, the most important ingredient is water. Fertilize in early spring with a complete fertilizer that contains slow or controlled release nitrogen and trace minerals.

Question of the Week: Large knots or galls are growing from the base of a pecan tree on my property. The tree appears unhealthy. What causes this?

Answer: Check to see if the knotty structures are firm and appear to be a part of the trunk of the tree. If so, it is evidently infected with a disease known as crown gall. This is a chronic bacterial infection and the tree has very likely been diseased since its seedling stage. There is no control for this disease.

Always check young pecan trees before planting them. Any that have gall-like structures of any size on the roots or at the base of the trunk should not be planted.