

~ Planting Trees for Good Establishment and Growth ~

Watering properly is one of our customers' most difficult things to get the knack of and is the most frequently asked question here at the nursery. Next to watering, how to plant a tree is probably the next most asked question. The Colorado Nursery and Greenhouse Association's planting guide for all kinds of plants is a good one, although with respect to balled and burlaped trees especially, it may be outdated. City foresters and arborists are among the most experienced and informed tree planters- after all they are charged with making the most of the budgets they have and with the health of the urban forests. These folks have established beyond a doubt that nearly all of the balled and burlaped trees that are dug from nursery fields are buried too deeply in the ball. This happens quite easily, especially with the machinery and techniques that most field growers use. It is very well documented and demonstrated at Douglas L. Airhart's & Guy Zimmerman's website: www.tlcfortrees.info/root_system.

As they illustrate, if you cannot see the trunk flare where the tree's first roots are attached to the trunk then you must carefully probe down in the ball to find it. This part of the tree must be above the soil grade after the tree is planted correctly. If it is buried below grade, especially in the heavy clay soils that our trees must live in, then the roots and tree will decline- possibly even to the point where the tree dies as a result.



Arborists and city foresters who live in the Pacific Northwest where the climate and soils are ideal for most trees have even taken successfully to bare rooting 2 inch caliper trees when they plant. Studies have also shown that the steel cage and burlap even hinder good root growth in newly planted trees. Here in Colorado bare rooting is out of the question, but when planting it is still possible to locate the trunk flare and position it properly. It is also possible to remove most if not all of the burlap and cage if the ball has the right moisture content and if tree hole is wide enough, which is impossible to overdo- the wider the better! It is most important that the ball stay intact and not fall apart when planting. If that begins to happen then the burlap and cage must remain in place as much as possible. One mistake we often see with large b&b trees is the all too natural tendency to use the trunk for moving the tree around when loading, unloading, and planting. This only weakens the ball and must be avoided at all cost. Handle plants by the root ball and not by the top. Protect the foliage with row cover, shade cloth, or a custom made tarp when taking the tree home. Plant as soon as possible. Dig as wide a saucer shaped hole as you can and plant at the correct depth. Remove as much of the burlap and cage as possible without compromising the root

ball. All of these steps, and proper watering, will help ensure, more than anything else, that your new tree will establish and grow well and give you all the years of pleasure that you expect.

- Jeff Wagner