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GARDEN NOTES

PLANTING SUMMER TREES IS A BREEZE

By Dennis Hinkamp

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There is no real reason why you can't plant trees in the summer; it is just a job most of us prefer to do when temperatures are not near or exceeding 100.

The trick is to start with a good tree, plant it properly and then give it the best care possible, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. When buying a tree, look for one that is green in color, not wilted, even though it may appear to have a good root system.

Most of our local nursery and garden centers are careful to keep their trees healthy and ready to be planted, Goodspeed says. Keep in mind the roots are confined to a small area, which limits the amount of water, nutrients and oxygen available. Trying to maintain a good balance of these essential elements can be complicated.

Once the perfect tree is purchased, take a little care while getting it home, he says. If possible, wrap, cover or place the tree in a protected canopy in the back of a truck. Many trees are permanently damaged while being transported from the nursery to their permanent home. Make sure the bark does not get rubbed off while it rests on the side of the truck bed or car trunk door. A dry wind can desiccate a tree and be more damaging than the hottest day in Death Valley. Slow down and take the back roads when transporting any plant material.

The first thing to keep in mind when planting a tree is its mature size. Allow for the space they will need 20 years from now, he explains. Do not plant a large tree within 10 feet of the house or other permanent structure. Also, look overhead to make sure it can grow tall without interfering with power lines.

Next, provide an appropriate hole to ensure a good, prosperous start, Goodspeed says. Many people get a little lazy when it comes to digging the hole. They figure the roots will grow down through anything, when in reality, most (if not all) roots grow horizontally and prefer a loose, well-drained soil. With this in mind, dig the hole really wide (a minimum of two-and-a-half to three times as wide as the root ball) and only as deep as the container or ball it came in from the nursery. The roots must establish themselves and have enough room to grow well or the tree won't thrive.

Once the site is prepared, gently lower the tree into the hole. If it came in a container, carefully remove the container, which may require cutting it away from the roots. If the tree is

balled and wrapped in burlap, remove all the wire and strings from the ball. Remove as much of the burlap as possible, too. However, during this process be careful to disturb the roots as little as possible. Do not break up the ball of soil that surrounds the roots. Put the root ball in the hole, then cut the wire and string off the ball. If it feels loose, start packing the soil around the ball while cutting off some of the burlap. Try to remove at least the top half of the burlap.

Once that's done, start filling the soil back into the hole, which is a good time to add some water, Goodspeed says. The tree will need enough moisture for the roots to survive any damage they may have suffered during transportation and planting. After the hole is filled, make a large mote or basin around the tree to help hold water around the root zone. When watering, keep in mind that the root zone is still very small and takes a while to reach out into the soil. Ask the nursery how often they were watering the tree, then keep that same schedule for the first month or so. This may mean watering every second or third day.

With all this good care, the tree will be on its way to a healthy, shade-providing life, he says. Next spring give it some fertilizer, start deep watering and, before you know it, there will be shade on the patio and leaves clogging the gutters.

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