

2000

## Fall Planting - Put Your Faith In It

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### Recommended Citation

Hinkamp, Dennis, "Fall Planting - Put Your Faith In It" (2000). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 922.  
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## GARDEN NOTES

# FALL PLANTING - PUT YOUR FAITH IN IT

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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October 2000

Fall-09

Fall planting is a religious experience. It requires faith and delayed gratification.

“Fall is a great time for planting,” says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. “Trees, shrubs, perennials and bulbs all enjoy being planted this time of year. And, in my humble opinion, fall is the best time for planting. It's even better than the spring or summer.”

When it comes to planting, autumn has several advantages over spring and summer, he says. One of the critical factors when planting a tree or shrub any time of year is getting it established as quickly as possible. Though the nights may start seeming cold, soil stays warm well after the air temperatures cool. After the plants go dormant and lose their leaves, the roots still keep growing and developing.

Having dead leaves is actually an advantage for root development, Goodspeed says. There is little or no extra pressure on the roots to supply water and nutrients to leaf and stem growth. This gives the roots extra energy to expend on growing and getting established. Some researchers have even suggested that roots continue to grow until the ground freezes. In Utah this can be as late as December or even into early January some years.

When planting a shrub or tree, be sure to dig a hole that is at least twice as wide as the root ball, he explains. This loosens the soil around the roots and gives them a place to grow. Most roots grow laterally rather than downward.

“The hole should be dug no deeper than the root ball or pot the plant came in,” he says. “In fact, I have had better luck with planting the root ball a little high, leaving it an inch or more out of the ground. This allows for some settling and makes sure that the plant is not placed in the hole too deep. Back fill the hole with the native soil. It can be useful to mix a little organic matter into that soil before filling it in around the roots. I recommend using a ratio of 70 percent native soil to 30 percent organic matter.”

Another trick to planting in the fall is to snuggle the plants with a thick layer of mulch to give them extra protection for the coming cool weather, Goodspeed says. An organic mulch spread around the base (over the roots) keeps the soil warm longer, allowing the roots more time to grow. It can also keep the soil from freezing and thawing, which can heave the plant out of the

ground in the middle of a hard winter.

“Apart from the weather conditions being right for establishment, many of the local nurseries and garden centers have special sales on plants this time of year,” he says. “They also know that plants survive the winter better in the ground than in a pot in the middle of a lonesome nursery.”

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/10/2000/DF)