



Proper Tree Planting: *A Short Guide for Homeowners*



“Planting and establishing trees is all about managing air and moisture in the soil. Manage these correctly and trees will grow quickly following planting. Three of the most common causes of poor plant establishment or tree death are planting too deep, under watering, and over watering. If appropriate trees are planted at the right depth and they are irrigated properly, the planting has a good chance of success. As simple as this appears to be, problems often arise that lead to poor establishment or plant failure.”

Introduction from UF/IFAS Extension publication

ENH 1061—“Planting and Establishing Trees”

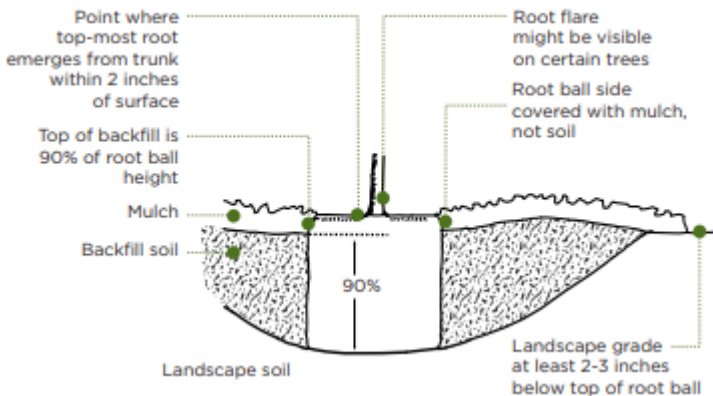
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Before You Plant Trees

- If you live in a community with an HOA, know and follow all landscape rules, covenants, or approval processes regarding any landscape changes, including planting trees
- Look down! Before digging to plant, utilize Sunshine811 for a free underground utility check and place trees far from hardscapes
- If you have a septic system, know where the drain field is located, and avoid planting over or near it
- Look up! Take into consideration wires, lights, and buildings that could interfere with canopy development as a tree grows to maturity
- Know your landscape conditions to be able to select the “Right Plant, Right Place” for trees. UF/IFAS Extension Pasco County’s Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program can always assist with this step 352-518-0156
- Select quality plants (Florida Grade #1 or Florida Fancy)
- Buy trees with only one trunk, except when the species normally has multiple trunks (crape myrtles and fringe trees, for example)
- Don’t buy pot-bound or poor condition trees
- Carry the tree by the pot, never by the trunk

How to Plant Trees

- Remove the pot, container or synthetic root containment materials.
- Check for root defects (circling) and cut roots that circle the outside of the root ball
- Dig a shallow and wide planting hole slightly less deep than the distance between the point where the topmost root emerges from the trunk and the bottom of the root ball, and at least 1.5 X the root ball diameter (wider is better!), and break up compacted soil



- Carefully place the tree in the planting hole, and position the topmost root about even or slightly (~2 inches) above the level of the surrounding landscape soil. If too low, remove the tree and backfill to ensure proper planting depth. This is a critical step for the overall and long-term health of the tree!

How to Plant Trees

- Begin to backfill the hole by placing soil around the base of the root ball to help support the tree upright
- Straighten the tree in the hole, and continue to backfill
- Don't pack the backfill, but do step firmly on the backfill soil to help stabilize the root ball
- Fill the planting hole so that the top most root remains above the backfill soil
- Water to complete soil saturation
- Fill in any holes or depressions to help remove large air pockets, but don't compact the soil. Soil contact with roots is important, but so is soil aeration
- Provide a 3-inch deep layer of organic mulch around the newly planted tree, but ensure that the mulch is not right up against the trunk or over the root ball
- Properly stake if needed
- Staking systems are usually removed after one year

How to Establish Trees

- Establishment is the time that it takes a tree to grow enough roots to stay alive without irrigation
- Usually about a year in our area for smaller stock; larger transplanted trees may take longer
- A rule of thumb for irrigation during establishment is trees should be watered 2-3 times per week with two gallons of water per inch trunk caliper (less in winter and during the rainy season)
- With Pasco County watering restrictions, this may be best accomplished by hand watering https://www.pascocountyfl.net/services/utilities/water_resources/index.php has the current details of Pasco County watering restrictions
- Protect the trunk against physical damage from string trimmers or lawn mowers
- Control weeds in the area over the root ball
- Increase the mulch diameter over time
- Minimize soil compaction
- Scout frequently for pests or disease problems; properly identify and treat according to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) methods

How to Maintain Trees

- Fertilization, if needed, can be done approximately six months after planting, but should only be done during the active growing season (~April to September)
- Use a balanced, complete and slow-release fertilizer, if needed
- Broadcast the fertilizer under the drip line of the canopy but not too close to the trunk
- Established trees usually don't need fertilizing (except fruit trees and palms)
- Palms have special fertilizer requirements. Use a palm-specific fertilizer according to the label and apply only during the active growing season (~April to September)
- Learn proper pruning techniques or utilize a certified arborist
- Don't prune until one year after planting, except to remove dead or damaged limbs
- Never hat-rack or "top" trees; don't make flush cuts or use tree wound paints
- After establishment is reached, turn off irrigation system "bubblers" if they were installed

General Helpful Tips

- Never pile up mulch against the tree in a “volcano” style. This can lead to trunk rot
- Young trees can grow into very large trees depending on the species. Choose your planting location carefully with mature width and height in mind
- Proper pruning throughout the life of the tree can help mitigate wind damage in storms
- Don't plant too deep! The top most root should be visible and above landscape grade after planting
- Keep turfgrass or weeds cleared away from the root zone. They can compete for water and nutrients important to tree growth
- Natural burlap or wire “cages” on nursery stock don't need to be removed before planting, but any synthetic burlap or other plastic materials do need to be removed prior to planting
- Don't use rock, gravel or synthetic mulches around plants
- During establishment, check any staking systems regularly to ensure that tree growth is not being restricted

Additional Information

UF/IFAS Extension Pasco County

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ (FFL) Program

352-518-0156

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ website:

<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

FFL Plant Guide:

<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/apps/plant-guide/>

Planting and Establishing Trees:

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP314>

Steps to planting a tree:

<https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/summary-planting.shtml>

To find a certified arborist in your area:

<https://www.treesaregood.org/>

For upcoming UF/IFAS Extension Pasco County classes, talks and workshops:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/o/ufifas-pasco-county-cooperative-extension-7831617239>

