

# How and When to Plant Trees

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Many homeowners think spring when they think about planting trees. But gardening experts consider fall the best time to add trees to the landscape. Trees planted now get a head start on establishing roots before summer returns.



Photos by JUAN GARCIA/DMN

**To transplant** a containerized tree, city of Dallas arborist Steve Houser digs a hole twice the width of the rootball.

Tree roots (and those of other plants) grow whenever the temperature is roughly above 40 degrees. In mild winters, roots gain the strength they need to deal with summer. And, because their roots have been growing all fall and winter, trees planted now burst with growth when spring arrives.

Homeowners may worry that a hard freeze or extended subfreezing weather will kill or damage trees planted in fall. It is a good idea to protect above-ground portions of recently planted trees and shrubs. Because the ground doesn't freeze in our area, the roots should be fine.

You can plant trees that are sold in pots or balled-and-burlapped specimens (a tree grown in the ground is dug up and its rootball wrapped in burlap) in fall. However, experts say to wait until winter to plant bare-root trees, including fruit and pecan trees. They should be dormant for best results.

If you're shopping for a tree with great fall color, you can see at the nursery exactly what color you'll get.

Once you've chosen a tree, what is the best way to plant it?

## PROPER PLANTING



**Remove twine** or baling wire binding burlap around the rootball.

1. Dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball. More important: Make sure the hole is no deeper than the top of the rootball. Planting the tree 1 to 3 inches above the level of the surrounding ground is best, since the tree may settle.
2. Place the tree on solid soil. Don't loosen the soil under the rootball, and don't add compost, bark or any other amendment. Lift and carry the tree by the rootball, not the trunk.
3. Backfill only with the soil you excavated for the hole.
4. Tamp down the soil around the rootball.
5. Water thoroughly to eliminate air pockets.
6. Use soil to build a 4-inch-tall berm around the edge of the hole. Add a 4- to 6-inch layer of mulch inside the ring, but never cover the root flare.

## POST-PLANTING TIPS



**If a tree is rootbound** when you remove it from its plastic pot, try to loosen the roots from their circular grip, even severing some, as demonstrated, to encourage lateral growth.

The extension service recommends lightly watering the tree every day for a week. The second week, water every other day. The third week, water every third day. The fourth week, water once a week, if needed. (Check the soil with a finger to see if it needs watering.)

Don't fertilize the tree after you plant it. Spring is the time for that, and even then go light on fertilizer, because fertilizer can burn roots.

Staking the tree is considered a last resort. Some experts believe staking weakens a tree's ability to thrive on its own once the stakes are removed and also can damage the bark, making it easier for pests to infiltrate.

However, if the trunk is too weak to support itself, use two stakes, on opposite sides of the tree, and remove them after one year. *Source: Texas Cooperative Extension*

**Maintaining a 2 to 4-inch layer of mulch** keeps roots cool in summer. Never cover a tree's root flare, the juncture where the vertical trunk fans out, with soil or mulch



## **TREE-PLANTING GUIDE**

Get a free tree planting guide from the city of Dallas Urban Forest Advisory Committee. Pick one up in the Park Department, 6th floor at City Hall, 1500 Marilla St.; at the Dallas County Texas Cooperative Extension office, 10056 Marsh Lane Suite B-101; and four recreation centers:

- Beckley-Saner, 114 W. Hobson;
- Reverchon, 3505 Maple;
- Campbell Green, 16600 Park Hill Drive; and
- Kidd Springs, 711 W. Canty.

The first copy, or as many as 10 for homeowner or community groups, is free. The committee requests a one-dollar donation for additional copies.

Download the guide at <http://www.dallastrees.org>.