

## *Tree Planting and Care*

*(This guide can be used for Shrubs and Vines, too!)*

Trees are our most valuable plant in the landscape. They give us beauty, oxygen, and shade, and sometimes fruit. They are home for wildlife, and they increase the value of our home. There are many common mistakes in choosing, planting, and maintaining trees that can cause harm, poor growth, or death of our investment. Pay attention to the following details, and reap years of increasing reward. **The numbers below correspond to the diagram on reverse.**

**CHOOSING** – Choose only trees that are native or well-adapted to your *particular* soil and our Central Texas climate. Determine if you have a deep clay soil, a shallow rocky soil, or a loamy soil – all three are present in Austin. Consult our staff or a native Texas plant guide to make the best choice for your soil and site. Be sure that the planting site can accommodate the mature size of the tree. Avoid a tree that has a girdling root – a large root that grows closely around the trunk. Also, check the soil level in the pot. You should be able to see the first main root(s) coming out of the trunk.

**(1.)** If not, then remove soil until the initial root is exposed. This is called the root flare or the trunk flare.

**PLANTING** – Texas 811 is a free service that locates your underground utilities. Use this service any time you plan to dig at your home or business. Call 811 toll-free from anywhere in Texas at least 48 hours in advance or go to [Texas811.org](http://Texas811.org). The ideal planting season for trees, shrubs, and hardy perennials in Central Texas is autumn. The new plant will get three seasons of mild weather in which to get established before the heat hits. To plant in any other season, pay very close attention to watering, especially in summer.

Dig the hole only as deep as the tree's rootball. **(2.)** The tree will need a firm foundation so it will not sink. Recent studies show that even native trees appreciate an improved soil. Therefore, amend the soil in an area at least twice as wide as the rootball. **(3.)** For loam or clay soils, mix in up to 40% compost into the native soil. Any **high quality finished compost** will work. For rocky limestone soils, either mix in or fill in with high organic material **garden soil** or create a large raised bed for your tree. Remember that most trees' roots are shallow and eventually extend out much farther than the size of the canopy. Keep the sides of the planting hole rough and jagged, rather than smooth-sided, so that the tree roots can more easily break through. **(4.)** Amend the soil and dig the planting hole before you remove the tree from its pot to minimize stress on the tree. The day before, or at least several hours before transplanting, be sure to water the tree thoroughly. A tree that is transplanted with a dry rootball will suffer greater transplant shock and possible death. Avoid carrying or handling the tree by its trunk.

Lay the tree on its side and gently remove the rootball from the container. Avoid pulling hard on the trunk to remove the rootball. Try to use gravity to allow the rootball to slide out of the pot, or cut the pot off of the rootball. Before planting, gently loosen the outer ½" or 1" of the rootball, pulling several roots away from the rootball. The goal here is to encourage the roots to stop circling and grow outward. Place the rootball in the center of the hole, and spread out any loose roots. Check that the root flare (trunk flare) **(1.)** is just above the level of the existing soil surface. Add or remove soil under the rootball accordingly. Firmly pack down any added soil. When the tree is at the proper level, begin to fill in with the amended backfill soil. This is a good time to add **mycorrhizae**, specific fungal organisms, to further help the tree avoid transplant shock, to be more drought resistant, and to prosper in the long run. Check from several angles that the tree is straight. Gently but firmly press down as you add soil all the way up to the existing soil surface. Use any extra soil to create a berm all the way around the tree, just beyond the rootball. **(5.)** This will hold irrigation water, giving it a chance to soak into the rootball and the soil just beyond. Water the root zone thoroughly immediately, filling in soil as necessary if there are sinkholes. As a final touch, add mulch at least 3" thick over the rootball area and berm. **(6.)** Don't cover the root flare. **Mulch** nourishes the soil as it decomposes. "Trees establish more quickly and develop stronger trunk and root systems if they are not staked at the time of planting." See [treesaregood.org](http://treesaregood.org) for more information. Water the tree again with a solution of **liquid seaweed** and/or **fish emulsion**.

**MAINTAINING** – A tree needs extra care the first 3-5 years after planting, especially in the summer. Unless we get a good 1" rain, water once a week during the growing season, more often during extreme heat (90° and above) or in rocky, fast-draining soils. In fall and winter, the new tree may need water every 2 – 4 weeks. Water the original rootball and the surrounding soil thoroughly. Water with **liquid seaweed** and/or **fish emulsion** once or twice a month. Avoid pruning, except to correct damaged branches, for at least the first full year. Small branches and twigs along the trunk help to feed the trunk, especially on a young tree. After two years, an established native tree needs water about once or twice a month, saturating the entire root zone under the canopy of the tree and slightly beyond. Maintain a 3" depth of mulch year-round. **Thank you for planting trees.** "He that plants trees loves others besides himself." *English Proverb*

