

# *East Wind* LANDSCAPE NURSERY

5614 State Rt. 19  
Belmont, NY 14813  
585-268-5535



## Tree & Shrub Planting Techniques

Choose a site for your plant that will accommodate future root and crown spread (an appropriate distance from buildings, foundations, pavements, septic systems, etc.). Keep in mind that a tree's root system is not, as was once thought, confined to within the drip line of the crown. In reality, sixty percent of a typical tree's roots will spread beyond the crown.

When determining the size of the planting pit to dig for a tree or shrub, keep in mind that most woody plant roots grow horizontally, rather than down. Therefore, it is better to dig a hole that is wide rather than deep. The planting pit depth should be no deeper than the distance from the plant's flares (where the trunk meets the roots) to the bottom of the root ball. Ideally the root ball should sit on undisturbed soil, but if hardpan needs to be broken up in the bottom of the pit, or if the hole was inadvertently dug too deep, tamp the loosened soil well to assure that the plant will not settle and bury the base of the trunk. A general guideline for a planting pit width is three times the tree ball diameter. This width may not be necessary when planting in very friable soil, though is essential if soil is heavy or compacted, as the loosened soil will accommodate horizontal root spread and give new feeder roots a hospitable environment.

If planting a balled and burlaped plant, ease the plant into the pit being careful not to break up the soil ball, check for proper depth, then place a small amount of soil around the base of the ball to stabilize it. Remove as much of the burlap, rope, and wire basket as possible. If planting from a container, loosen or cut bound or circling roots. Backfill the pit halfway with the excavated soil\* and water in to remove air pockets. Allow the water to drain before continuing to fill the hole to ground level, and then water in again. Apply 3 to 4 inches of organic mulch over the planting area to conserve moisture and discourage weeds. Avoid placing mulch against the plant's trunk or stems as this could invite insects and diseases.

\*Unless your native soil is excessively sandy or heavy clay, it is not necessary to add soil amendments to the backfill. Sandy soils will benefit from the addition of a good loam or an organic material such as peat or compost to aid in moisture and nutrient retention. Clay soils are a bit more difficult to correct, as when the backfill composition differs too greatly from the surrounding soil, the pit can act as a tub and hold too much water and/or cause roots to circle within the amended area. A small amount of good loam mixed well with the existing clay is preferable to the addition of sand (which will produce adobe) or organic matter (which will increase the water holding capacity). If poor drainage of the planting area on very heavy clay soils is a concern, a sloped drainage spur can be dug to several feet from the pit and filled with gravel.

Due to the decreased number of feeder roots and the potential of transplant shock, it is not necessary or recommended to fertilize woody plants with nitrogen at planting time. However, triple super phosphate (0-40-0) can be mixed with the backfill to encourage root growth. Begin fertilizing with a balanced fertilizer, as necessary, one year after planting.

Newly planted trees & shrubs require supplemental irrigation. If your soil is well-drained, water deeply on a weekly basis throughout the growing season. If drainage is poor, monitor water needs by investigating soil moisture with a hand trowel. It should be damp but not waterlogged. Keep in mind that most container plants are potted in very loose media consisting of peat, bark, and other aerators, which may dry out while the surrounding native soil is still moist.