

PLANTING TREES & Shrubs

By

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Early springtime is a good time of year to plant trees, shrubs and perennials in Wyoming. Trees & shrubs, and perennials need time to recover from transplant shock before hot weather sets in and to establish new roots before winter comes. This time of the year generally is cooler and wetter therefore putting less stress on plants and allowing good root growth without high water demands from the leaves. In addition, most of the greenhouses and catalog stores offer specials or have sent out information at this time of the year. Remember to look for a good quality tree or shrub, which will grow in USDA zone 4, 3, or lower, depending on where you live in Wyoming, do not always rely on what is available or advertised. Try to find out where it was grown, the closer to Wyoming the better.

Whether planting seedlings, bare root, balled, or container-grown plants, there are a few basic guidelines to follow. The first consideration is deciding where to plant. It is important to know the mature height and width in order to give the plant the room it will need to grow. Look the area over, visualize the plant at maturity or at least 10 years down the road, and make sure it fits in with your design. Answer these type of questions, is it far enough away from the house, porch, roof, sidewalk, street corner, etc.?

Plant trees at the same depth they were at a nursery. A one-inch difference in depth could affect a tree (depending on size) three to five years later. It is better to plant a little shallow than a little deep. A planting hole should be about the same depth as the root ball. The width of a hole should be three times the diameter of a root ball or a tree's container. This will allow the trees plenty of room for the roots to grow into the loose soil. If there is any circling roots cut them and if it is a potted plant and there are circling roots it is best to cut into the root ball on several sides to cut these roots. Improper planting can cause the tree to grow slowly and eventually may die from the circling roots. Do not amend a heavy clay soil with organic matter as this creates a clay pot situation and the roots will not move out into the surrounding soil. Nitrogen fertilizer is not appropriate the first year, I recommend adding phosphorous fertilizer to the hole; a slow release fertilizer is the best. Remove everything from the outside of the roots such as, the container, burlap, wires etc. and spread the roots out. After a tree is in position, begin adding soil all around it, slightly firming the soil and alternating it with water, allowing it to soak in which will eliminate any air holes. Mulching around a tree will help to retain needed moisture as well as keep the soil cool, aid in weed control and minimize maintenance.

Stake trees only if they are leaning from the wind. To avoid damaging the tree when staking use a soft wide material especially designed for this purpose also, be sure not to tie a tree too tightly, leave some room for a tree to move. Following these suggestions, the trees should be off to a great start.

Check the root ball frequently to make sure it is moist particularly the first year. Try not to over water with our heavy clay soils. Frequent and light is better than heavy and infrequent the first year.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan County office, cooperate.