

Horticulture

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New Method Recommended for Planting Trees

The American Forestry Association, in cooperation with the National Urban Forest Council, has developed new guidelines for properly planting a tree. The idea is to plant so that the roots have a chance to grow into the surrounding soil and produce healthy, vigorous branches, foliage, and roots.

The old suggestion was to dig the hole 6 inches wider and deeper than the root ball and backfill it with peat moss or other soil amendments. This method creates a "pot effect" that allows roots to grow outward in the good soil, but it also encourages roots to encircle the plant pit. The small planting hole soon fills with roots. As the tree crown continues to grow over time, tree health declines.

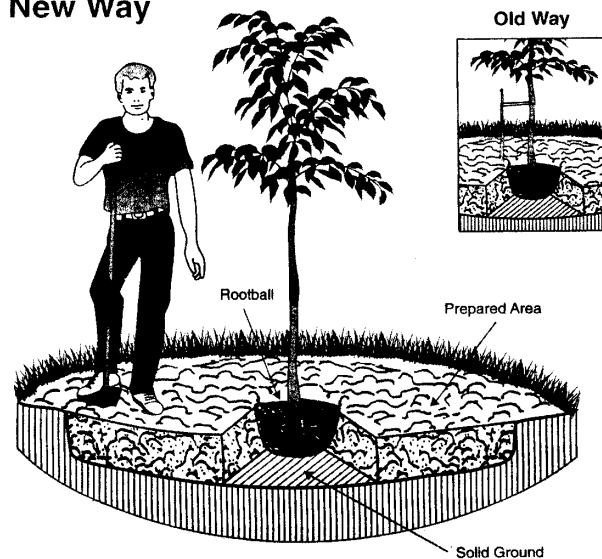
The new recommendations, based on recent research, suggest marking out a planting area five times the diameter of the plant root ball and using a rotary tiller or shovel to loosen and mix the soil in the entire area to a depth of about 12 inches. Organic matter can be added to the loosened soil as long as the material is used uniformly throughout the area.

In the center of the prepared area, dig a shallow hole to set the tree's root ball. The hole should allow the root ball to sit on solid ground rather than loose soil. After the tree is properly situated, cut and remove the rope or wire basket holding the burlap and cut the excess burlap away from the root ball. Position the tree perpendicular to the ground with the main stem growing straight up.

Backfill around the root area and gently pack the soil to remove major air pockets. Water can be used instead of your feet to help to settle the soil around the roots. This will also prevent excessive compaction. The upper surface should be level with or slightly higher than the existing soil. Rake the soil evenly over the entire area and cover with 3 to 4 inches of mulch.

Tree planting is a more involved process than we once thought. Research indicates that correctly planted trees can grow twice as fast and live twice as long as those improperly set out.

New Way



New research-based recommendations call for planting a tree in a prepared area five times the diameter of the root ball.