

## Fall tree planting



FALL IS TRADITIONALLY A TIME FOR PUTTING THE GARDEN TO BED and preparing the borders for their required cold dormancy. But fall can also be a beginning. With the cool temperatures and predictable rainfall, it is an ideal time to consider the installation of specimen trees. From now until the soil is frozen, trees and shrubs can be planted into your outdoor living space. Potted specimens available at your local nursery will also be entering dormancy at this time of year making them ideal candidates for installation.

Dormancy is a type of botanical anaesthetic, so if undertaken well, the planting operation will cause a minimum of stress for the tree or shrub. Carefully plan where a new tree or shrub is to be planted, then dig a hole that is half again as large as the root ball contained in the pot. This ensures that new roots will grow out to meet friable, well-prepared soil instead of encountering the compact, oxygen-deprived soil typical of poorly cultivated sites.

After removing a newly purchased tree from its pot, gently tease the roots free from the “pot shape” they have grown to resemble. Sometimes the new roots will continue to grow in the typical circular pattern of the pot perimeter even after they are installed into the living soil. When this happens the roots are prevented from growing out into the surrounding soil where nutrients and moisture can be found. Furthermore, roots that do not reach out into the living soil provide poor anchoring for the tree. As a result, even after a number of years the tree risks toppling over in high winds or when the soil becomes soft after an exceptional amount of rainfall.

The soil to be replaced into the planting hole can be amended with organic matter to supply nutrients and to encourage earthworms that will promote adequate drainage and aeration. Well-rotted compost or manure is ideal. Plant a new tree or shrub at the same depth it was growing in its container. Piling soil higher up the stem could lead to stem rot. Mulch the site well after planting, but keep the mulch away from the main stem. This will delay freezing of the soil and offer the new roots an additional amount of time to develop and mature. Then water the new acquisition well. A thorough drink will collapse any large air pockets unavoidably left during installation. Don't fertilize the newly planted specimen – a thick layer of mulch and a thorough drink of water should see the new plant through its first winter.

Do not expect to see extensive growth next year from a tree or shrub planted this fall. In order to accommodate new green growth a plant must first develop supportive root growth underground. Next spring most growth will take place under the soil out of sight. Give new trees and shrubs a chance to gain a firm root-hold before expecting the production of new branches. In the first growing season after installation, what you get is what you don't see!