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Proper Tree Planting is Critical

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Fall is an ideal time for planting since temperatures are cool and trees and shrubs put more energy to the root system than in the spring. Buying and planting a tree is an important investment. Many tree health problems can be traced back to improper planting, so it is important to do it properly. Follow these guidelines and you will have a tree that will give you pleasure for years to come.

Prepare a hole that is three times the diameter of the rootball. Be sure not to disturb the native soil on which the tree will rest. Remove any grass from a three foot radius around the tree. Amend the soil only if it has extremely poor texture, such as heavy clay or very sandy soil, and then do not add more than 25% amendment. Remove any rocks or trash if they are present. Next, remove the same volume of soil that will be displaced by the tree and the amendment. This will avoid soil from eventually moving next to the trunk and causing it to become too deeply planted.

Be sure the tree is planted at the proper depth. Very frequently, trees are planted too deeply, which will cause a slow decline in tree vigor or outright failure of the tree to survive transplanting. Look for the "root flare" – the place where the root starts to widen from the trunk – and plant that portion of the tree at or slightly above the soil line.

The burlap and metal cage, if present, should be cut away to keep from obstructing roots as they grow. Be sure containerized trees do not have circling roots, and if they do, carefully cut them and spread out the roots from the rootball during planting.

A newly transplanted tree may tilt or simply fall over during our windstorms. In this case, you should purchase a staking kit and follow directions, making sure the tree still has some room to flex during windstorms. Avoid wrapping wire around branches, even if it is inside old hose or other material. The staking will create some strength in the tree trunk that once the staking kit is removed, will protect the tree from trunk breakage. Secure the stakes in the ground on the windward side of the tree. Remove the stakes after one year after planting. Your tree should be established enough to protect it from wind. Leaving staking kits on too long may cause girdling of branches.

Moose Valley Farms will be conducting a demonstration of tree planting for their Find Out Fridays series at 10 am Friday, September 12. RSVP 267-5108.

Mike Bauer is the Horticulturist for Moose Valley Farms, a full-service garden center located in Naples at mile marker 495. Please feel free to call us at 267-5108 or stop in if you have any questions.