



# Tree Planting Guide

by Lacey Jennen, urban forester, City of Fort Smith Parks & Rec

## **Remember, look up! Don't plant trees under utility lines.**

1. Dig the planting hole no deeper than the height of the root ball and 2, 3 times wider than root ball. You should have a shallow, wide planting hole.
2. Carry the tree by the pot or wire basket, never handle by the trunk. This could loosen and break the fine absorbing roots.
3. After removing the pot, loosen roots and cut circling roots. If pot-bound, make several cuts down the side of the root ball.
4. If a balled and burlap tree, remove all burlap if root ball is firm and intact. If it appears that the root ball will fall apart, just remove the top 1/3 of the burlap. Remove ALL the wire caging and twine from around the trunk. Check that the root flare of the trunk is visible and the top most root is within the first 2 inches of soil, no deeper. If soil is up too high on the trunk, remove excess soil to where the root flare is visible. Excess soil on the roots can impede the availability of oxygen to growing roots, causing root death.
5. Position tree in the hole to where the soil line of the root ball is just above grade. If in an area where there is poor drainage, plant 3-4 inches above grade. This will prevent the tree from settling to deep in the hole.
6. Backfill the planting hole with the same soil you removed to dig the hole. Do not add any other planting amendments such as potting soil, mulch, or compost, they are not needed. Using the native soil from the hole will encourage roots to grow beyond the planting hole.
7. When the hole is half full of soil, water to help remove air pockets, then continue to fill hole until it is full.
8. After the tree is planted, build a berm with native soil, topsoil, or mulch around the outer edge of the planting hole. The height of the berm will depend on the tree size. For example a 2 inch tree will require a berm that is around 4-5 inches tall. This will direct water flow to the root ball where it is needed.
9. Top dress tree and berm with an organic mulch such as cottonseed hulls, pine bark, cedar, or cypress. Avoid using plastic or rubber mulches. These don't provide the tree with the same benefits of organic mulch.
10. Stake the tree only if it is needed. For example, if the tree is top heavy or in a windy location. The tree needs to be able to sway and move in order to build a strong trunk. Make sure the wire or rope are wrapped with protection to prevent them from rubbing wounds on the trunk. Old tire inner tubes or soft, flexible garden hose work well. Remove all staking materials after one year, no longer.
11. Maintain the newly planted tree on a watering schedule for the next year. New trees should receive around an inch per week during the growing season. Soil should remain moist, but not wet. Over watering can kill trees just as easily as drought conditions. Best rule of thumb is to check your soil moisture before watering. Fill the water basin full each time you water. After tree is established, the berm can be removed.

## **Remember....**

- Fertilize after the first year based on soil sample recommendations.
- Don't prune until 1 year after planting unless to remove dead or damaged limbs.
- Don't top your trees! It is very harmful to the long-term health of your tree.
- Don't apply tree wound or pruning paints. Trees can take care of their wounds themselves.
- Keep weed eaters and lawnmowers away from trunks. These can permanently scar and injure trunks.