

Proper Tree Planting and Establishment – A Few Recommendations

Justin Evertson, Nebraska Forest Service, October 2022

1. **PICK THE RIGHT TREE FOR THE RIGHT PLACE.** Pick good, reliable species that are adapted to the planting site (wet vs dry, sun vs shade, etc.) and that grow to the desired size. Take advantage of favorable tree-growing conditions like north slopes, depressions or drainageways that don't dry out as fast. Remember that regionally native species help sustain more biodiversity. **Avoid problematic invasive species** like ornamental pear or goldenraintree.
2. **PLANT TREES IN GROUPS WHENEVER POSSIBLE!** Mimic the forest. Trees prefer to grow in association with each other.
3. **SOIL IS IMPORTANT!** Try to plant in good, organic, friable soil and practice good soil management. The best soils are alive with insects, microorganisms and fungi – the **“Wood Wide Web”**. Recycle nutrients like leaves, stems, mulch, grass clippings etc., around trees.
4. **MOST TREES DON'T DO AS WELL IN HIGH-INPUT LAWNS.** Separate the two by mulching around trees and planting in mass with other trees, shrubs or associated groundcovers.
5. **PLANT IN THE SPRING OR FALL WHEN THE WEATHER IS COOL.** Avoid the hottest part of the summer from mid-June through early September.
6. **CHOOSE A GOOD QUALITY TREE.** Pay attention to the root system and avoid plants that are “pot-bound”. Avoid nursery trees that are limbed up and top-heavy.
7. **PLANTING SMALLER TREES HAS KEY ADVANTAGES.** Plant an acorn even!
8. **AVOID PLANTING TOO DEEP!** The root flare should be visible at base of trunk and first main lateral roots should be no deeper than 1-2” below soil surface. Remove excessive soil or growing medium above roots before planting.
9. **AVOID STEM GIRDLING ROOTS AND SEVERELY CIRCLING ROOTS!** Correct girdling, circling or pot-bound roots at planting time and/or reject compromised root systems before purchase!
10. **MULCH AFTER PLANTING – 2-3” deep and as wide as the dripline at least, expanding the mulch ring over time.**
11. **STAKE PROPERLY** if the tree could dislodge in the wind. Remove staking within a year.
12. **USE A TRUNK GUARD** if there is concern about mower, trimmer or animal damage.
13. **WATER REGULARLY THE FIRST YEAR** – every few days for the first several weeks then about once a week for the rest of the year to keep the soil moist but not water-logged. Trees in irrigated lawns are often over-watered and we lose many young trees to too much water!
14. **DON'T OVER-PRUNE WHEN YOUNG.** Low branches are good for food production, trunk protection, trunk taper and quicker establishment.
15. **DON'T HARM THE TREE** with mowers, trimmers, herbicides, poor watering, dog chains, compacting the soil around them (driving, parking, construction, etc.).

More Information:

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- Nebraska Statewide Arboretum: <https://plantnebraska.org/>;
 - Project Funding: Trees for Nebraska Towns, Greener Towns & Waterwise Landscapes
- UNL- SNR Community Forestry, Tree ID: <https://snr.unl.edu/data/trees/identification/index.aspx>