



Fall Tree Planting

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Fall is a great time to plant a tree or trees and to add to the success of the Plant a Million project. Plant a Million is a cooperative effort of many groups and organizations, including the County Soil and Water Conservation District, to plant a million or more mostly native trees in central Indiana over the next 6 to 10 years. It is more enjoyable to work outdoors in the fall and the tree benefits because the soil retains more moisture than during the hot and dry days of summer. This results in quicker establishment of the roots in their new location.

Soil drainage is one of the most important keys to successfully growing a healthy tree. Very few tree species do well if the roots are constantly saturated. Check soil drainage by digging a hole about 18 to 20 inches deep. That is the depth that most of the roots will be growing. Fill the hole with water and check it in 24 hours and again in 48 hours. If it has drained well in that amount of time, the soil drainage is good for almost all species of trees.

If your new tree or trees are to be a part of the landscaping for a new home, beware of soil compaction. New home construction requires a lot of heavy vehicle, tractor and other traffic during the construction process. This means a lot of compaction has probably occurred and the air space and drainage of the soil has been affected. It is a good idea to till the soil several inches deep for a distance of 6 to 8 feet away from where the tree will be located. This will help the roots grow outward from the tree and help it become well anchored in the soil. Compacted soil can cause the roots to grow in a circular fashion in the hole and not move out into the soil. This can cause “girdling” and eventual death of the tree.

Dig the hole for the tree at least 2 to 3 times wider and about the same depth – no deeper – as the root ball or container. It is important that the tree be planted not deeper than it grew in the nursery field or container. In fact, an inch or two higher is even better for the tree.

The old planter’s adage that it is better to plant a \$50.00 tree in a \$100.00 hole rather than planting a \$100.00 tree in a \$50.00 hole is good advice.

Place the tree in the hole and refill it with the soil you removed. It is best not to add peat moss or other organic matter because the roots need to become acclimated to the soil outside the hole area where most of them will be growing. As you refill the hole, gently tamp it to remove air pockets but be careful not to compact the soil. This establishes good contact between the roots and the soil. Water deeply and continue to water about once a week if natural rainfall is less than one inch per week. Deep watering on a weekly basis is much better than squirting a little water at it every day.

Finally it is best to wait till spring to add any fertilizer. In fact, most tree specialists will say that regular lawn fertilization provides all the nutrition need by yard trees.



Make your new fall planted tree count! Report it as a part of the central Indiana Plant a Million campaign by going the www.plantamillion.org website. Contact your County Soil and Water Conservation District for more tree planting information and to learn about their fall tree sale.

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