

Janet B. Carson
Extension Horticulture Specialist
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Trees are a luxury that many of us take for granted, until we lose one. Our dry fall had many trees shedding leaves early and some trees may have died. Wait until next spring to assess tree health before removing any.

Healthy trees add beauty to our landscapes and provide shade for daily living during the growing season. They make our world a much more pleasant place to live. Trees help cool and clean the air, help to deaden sound and provide shade. Many homeowners plant trees to provide shade in the summer, and give us a brief respite from the sun and heat. With proper tree placement, you can reduce your air-conditioning bill by up to one-third in the summer, and then help warm your house in the winter, allowing sunlight in after the leaves have fallen off.

Fall is the ideal time to plant a tree, and I think November is the best month. Our trees are going dormant or are dormant, we still have some residual soil heat, and we typically get ample rainfall in the fall. When deciding on what tree to plant, you need to assess your landscape. Do you want a large shade tree, or a smaller ornamental tree? What is the mature height you are looking for and how much room do you have for the width of the canopy? Always look up before planting. You don't want to plant a large tree under power lines, or someone will prune your tree for you, and it won't be the shape you desire. Make sure you plant the trees far enough away from your home to allow the canopy to branch out in all directions.

Liking a specific tree and being able to grow that particular tree may be two different things. What trees are doing well in your area and what do we have problems with? Visit your nursery to see what's available. You may love aspen trees, but have you ever seen one growing in Arkansas? They are not suited to our growing conditions. Bradford pears are one of the most popular trees, but fall apart with age, and are becoming invasive—plus they are large at maturity. Ask questions about what trees do well in your part of the state. Find out what kind of conditions the trees thrive in—wet locations, or very dry locations, full sun, or partial shade. Your local county extension agent or your local nurseryman can help you choose the right tree for your yard.

Once you have chosen your tree, correct planting is important. Trees are sold in one of three ways: bare root, balled-in-burlap, or container grown. Bare root plants are typically available as small whips in late winter. They need to be obtained dormant and planted while dormant as there is no soil to grow in. Spread the root system out in the planting hole and water well at planting. Plant them at the depth they were growing. Make sure that once the soil settles they are not too deep. Don't let the root system dry out, but don't store it in water for days either.

Balled-in-burlap trees can be planted any time of the year, but care must be taken to protect the tree when temperatures are really hot and dry. Fall to early spring planting is best. Be sure to cut the burlap several places when planting to help it break down once in the ground. Cutting the burlap allows for easier root penetration. Cut back or fold back the burlap by at least two inches from the top. You don't want any burlap exposed above-ground. Leaving it exposed to the air creates a wick-like action

that will dry out the soil faster than it would normally. Remove any wires or ties that are holding the burlap around the tree. These wires could eventually girdle the tree.

Container grown trees are becoming more and more popular. Container grown trees can be planted year-round, but for ease of transplant and establishment, dormant season planting is ideal. Today there are all sizes of mature trees sold in containers, but bigger is not always better. Many times a medium to small tree will have less shock of transplant, and get established much more quickly. When removing the tree from the container, be sure to cut or score the roots to allow them to spread out more quickly. This also breaks up the soil and aids in better contact with the root system and the existing soil. Plant at the same depth they are currently growing, or slightly more shallow. Planting any of these trees too deep can lead to the death of the trees.

Backfill your planting holes with the existing soil if possible. If your soil is extremely poor and you need to amend, try to amend as wide an area as possible. Amending just the planting hole doesn't help much in root establishment. Remember a tree will usually have roots as far out as it is tall once it is established.

Water is the most important ingredient for success in the first three years after planting. Don't water to the point of drowning, but do put down an inch of water per week. Fertilizer should not be used in the planting hole. Try to have a ring of mulch around the trees keeping any lawn grass away from the trunk for the first few years. Research has shown that the growth of young trees can be retarded by grass growing right up next to the trunk. Turf at the base of the tree also requires mowing or edging which can lead to lawn mower and weed eater injury. So mulch the base of the tree, and keep the turf away.

Once established, if you have chosen the right tree for the right spot, there will not be a lot of maintenance. Do monitor for broken limbs or too much completion between branches and prune accordingly. Watering is still the key ingredient to plant success.