

Planting and Care of Tree Seedlings

When You Get Them Home

Your seedlings have the best chances for survival if you plant them as soon after purchase as possible. Store newly purchased seedlings in a cool dark location until they can be planted. If your seedlings are stored for more than a week, open the bag and dampen the roots periodically. Don't soak or leave the roots submerged in water while the trees are in storage.

When To Plant

Plant seedlings as soon as possible in early spring. The suggested tree planting season in Ohio begins when frost leaves the ground in early May. This period is most often ideal for tree planting because soil moisture is high, temperatures are relatively mild, and the trees being planted are still dormant.

Fall planting is not recommended because recently planted seedlings are usually not able to withstand severe frost heaving. Bare-root evergreens planted in the fall may not be able to fully establish their root system until spring, which can cause needles to dry out from winter winds and frozen conditions.

Trees may grow slowly for the first few years as they concentrate all their energy on root development during the "transplant shock" stage. Expect a certain amount of mortality. This will depend a great deal on how carefully they are planted and weather conditions during the early period of transplant shock.

Where To Plant

Before planting, consider the purpose of the planting and the growth potential of seedlings in height and width to determine the appropriate tree spacing.

Trees and shrubs have soil and sunlight requirements that must be considered when selecting where they will be planted. All will do best if placed in sunny locations and in soils that have reasonably good drainage and ample topsoil. In reality, these conditions are often difficult to find and some compromises may need to be made. However, there are limits to the extent that trees are able to adapt to adverse conditions. As a rule, never plant on sites that are very dry in the summer months or very wet in the spring. You can find more detailed information from Ohio Department of Natural Resources – Division of Forestry's website.

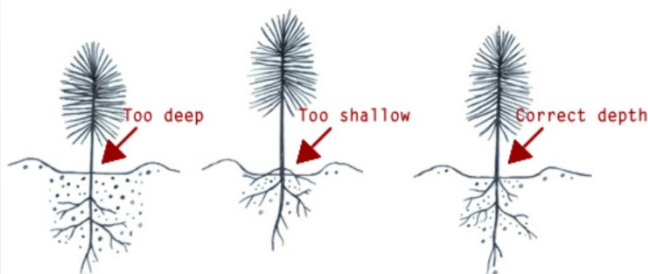
How To Plant

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

When planting bare-root seedlings, it is important that the roots are planted straight up and down and not bunched up at the bottom of the planting hole, or “J” rooted. A Y-shaped stick may be used to straighten roots in the hole while planting.

Sometimes it may be necessary to prune the roots prior to planting if the seedling’s roots are longer than the depth of the hole you are making. If the roots need to be pruned, pruning shears or another sharp tool may be used. It is never recommended to remove more than 25% of the root system.

Depth of planting is a very important consideration. Do not bury any part of the trunk. The soil surface should be where the trunk meets the root system. Also, ensure the planting hole is deep enough so that no roots are exposed.



THE “HEELING” PROCESS

If you can't plant tree seedlings within a week or two, it might be better to heel them in for planting in late summer or the next spring. Heeling in is a temporary, short-term storage technique for bare-root seedlings, keeping roots moist and protected from air/sun when immediate planting is not possible. It involves digging a shallow, V-shaped trench in a shady area, laying seedlings in at an angle, and

covering the roots with soil/mulch. Choose a site protected from wind and partially shaded. Water heeled-in seedlings heavily once or twice per week particularly during dry, hot weather.

Seedling Care

Young trees can be damaged by a variety of animals including rabbits, squirrels, groundhogs, voles, and deer. In areas where deer are abundant, it can be a real challenge to establish tree seedlings. Tree shelters are one of the most effective methods. Tree shelters are plastic tubes 2-6 feet long that protect seedlings from animal browse, herbicide, and mowing. They also create a mini greenhouse effect which maintains moisture and a more stable temperature.

After planting, it is necessary to take certain precautions to protect this investment of time, money, and effort. Mowing and weed control around seedlings is needed for two or three years after planting to keep weeds from competing with the young seedlings and to help keep rodents away.

Diseases and insect pests can become a serious threat to your trees. It is important to regularly monitor the health of your trees. If excessive damage is found, contact OSU Extension at (440) 326-5851 to help identify the cause and best treatment options.

For additional information on care after planting or seedling protection, contact Lorain County Soil & Water Conservation District, OSU Extension, or your local service forester.