

Ricky Josey

Planting Trees and Shrubs? Do It Right The First Time

In choosing a timely topic, I couldn't decide on "proper planting of trees and shrubs" or something to do with water conservation. Well, in fact, proper planting goes a long way toward helping plants survive the drought conditions while getting started.

Fall and early winter are the best times to plant trees and perennial shrubs. Most purchased plants are container grown and thus can be planted anytime but still, fall and winter is best. For transplanting shrubs from one site to another, fall is definitely the desired time. Either way, proper planting can go a long way towards not having to do it all over when replacing the dead plant.

All holes are not created equal. Many a plant has not survived the hole dug, straight sided, with post hole diggers. We all know what our clay soils are like to work with. The sides of the holes have that hard, glazed pottery look to them. Dig the holes for individual trees or large shrubs two to three times the diameter of the container they are in. Slope the sides so that the hole doesn't act like just another pot. When finished, break up or roughen up the sides to allow roots easier access to soil outside.

If planting several shrubs in one area, you'll be better off in the long run to work up the entire area. Once the hole is ready, make sure to plant at the same depth as the tree or shrub was growing in the pot. If planted just a few inches too deeply, the small feeder roots often suffocate and die. Our red clay soil benefits greatly from added organic matter so work some compost into the bed or fill soil. When the planting is complete, make sure to water thoroughly and provide plenty of mulch. Don't however, pile mulch up around the trunk as this encourages decay organisms, not to mention that this looks more like tiny volcanoes than neatly laid mulch. Contrary to popular opinion, do not add fertilizer to the hole.

Following proper planting techniques is necessary for survival of newly planted trees and shrubs anytime, but especially during droughts. Properly dug holes and compost help roots explore for nutrient and moisture. Organic matter assists with water and oxygen infiltration and mulch prevents evaporation and temperature extremes.

I've often heard the warning "don't plant a ten dollar tree in a two dollar hole." You can take the time to do it right the first time or do it all over later. As dry as we've been, I sure don't want to dig too many holes in our good ole Georgia red clay.