Care at Planting Yields Healthy Fruit Trees

The excitement of planting fruit trees is often dampened when the trees grow poorly or die during the first year. This can be called post-plant tree shock. By understanding some of the causes and following some simple guidelines can greatly reduce the problem. It is good to buy dormant trees. When planting these trees they should be planted while they're still dormant, which means before buds begin to grow. If the tree has started growing before it's planted, it may have difficulty getting established.

Planting trees in wet clay soils can create a tree hole with a hard-glazed side. This glazing creates a pot effect that keeps roots from penetrating and causes them to circle in the original hole. In essence, the tree can quickly become pot-bound. This also inhibits water drainage. Fruit trees, particularly peach trees, are very sensitive to poor drainage. Wet feet are a major cause of poor growth and tree death. Planting trees too deep is also a common culprit. Tree roots need oxygen to grow, and planting too deep suffocates roots, causing poor growth and even death.

The decline of the top of the tree follows the decline of the root system. The best rule of thumb is to plant the tree close to the same depth that it grew in the nursery. On bare-root trees, use the soil stain on the rootstock as a guide. The uppermost root should be no deeper than two to three inches. Remember to account for tree settling in the planting hole. You should hold the tree at the desired level, sift soil over roots and firmly pack with your feet when the hole is half to three—quarters full. Water the tree hole to provide moisture and eliminate air pockets in the soil. After the water has soaked in, you should fill the hole the rest of the way with loose soil.

The 4-H program home fruit promotion sale is still going on. The deadline for ordering is noon on Tuesday, February 7, 2012. For more information on care and planting fruit trees or other subjects you can call the Twiggs County Extension Office at 945-3391.