



Transplanting Trees and Shrubs

Contact: Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

August 1996

When adding trees or shrubs to your home landscape, be sure you have the right plant for the right place, taking into account the site, the hardiness of the new plants, and your geographic location. Following are things you can do to be sure your transplants become well established:

- Check the plant over thoroughly before buying it. Look for vigorous growth and good leaf color. Check the roots -- healthy roots are white and firm; blackened, mushy roots indicate disease or pest problems. If you note any problems, choose another plant.
- Check your proposed site to be sure it is appropriate for the trees and/or shrubs you want to place there. Check the site to be sure the plants will receive adequate sunlight. Check the soil for pH, proper drainage, and porosity (air space so the roots can penetrate deep into the soil to anchor it and gather moisture).
- Plant your tree or shrub correctly and provide adequate care for it while it becomes established in your landscape. Your local Extension office has information available on proper planting of trees and shrubs.
- Be sure to water your plants during dry periods while it is becoming established. Transplants do not yet have an extensive root system to reach deep into the soil and take in water, so they can become stressed easily. This also makes them more susceptible to injury from insects and diseases.
- At the same time, be sure your plant is not getting too much water, either by overwatering or being planted in a soil that does not properly drain. Excess water suffocates the roots and will eventually kill the plant.
- Place your transplant at the appropriate depth. Planting it too shallow can cause damage to the roots from temperature and soil moisture fluctuations, while planting it too deep will suffocate and kill the roots.
- If your transplant was grown in a container and its roots have become coiled inside the pot, be sure to uncoil and gently spread the roots apart before planting.
- Always remove rope, wire, twine, or burlap from a tree or shrub before transplanting to prevent strangling the trunk or roots as the plant grows.
- Watch for signs of stress, such as wilting leaves, leaf scorch, discoloration of foliage, and stunted growth. Determine what is causing the stress, and take steps to correct it. For example: if your tree has leaf scorch (a sign

of water stress) and you are already irrigating it, you may need to water it for a longer time to allow the water to penetrate deeper into the soil.

Most important, be patient since you probably will not see signs of vigorous growth within the first 12 months after transplanting. It takes a few years for woody plants, especially trees, to become established in your landscape.

(Adapted from "Help Trees, Shrubs Avoid Transplant Shock," by David Swaciak in Chautauqua Living, Volume 19, Number 8.)

Visit [Virginia Cooperative Extension](#)