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PLANTING TREES PROPERLY OR ... The 10 Commandments of Tree Planting

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Nebraska Forest Service
Community Forestry Program

PLANTING TREES PROPERLY OR...
The 10 Commandments of Tree Planting

Tree planting is an ancient art, but the methods have changed over time to reflect the latest and best arboricultural and forestry research. It is vitally important to remember where trees live in nature. In the natural forest there are no sidewalks, automatic sprinklers, streets, parking lots, tall buildings, or other man made objects.

These guidelines are the most current practices that are recommended for proper tree planting. It is tough being a tree in Nebraska, but following these procedures will provide a planted tree the best means of surviving and growing to maturity.

1. Selection is important - Select the right tree for the right place...many serious problems can be avoided by proper selection decisions.
2. Pre-planting care - Keep planting stock in shaded location and well watered. Don't get rough with the planting ball or container. If you have to hold a plant over, make sure it is moist and shaded. When shipping trees it is important to have them covered to avoid heavy loss of water through transpiration. Keep in mind that when trees are transplanted from the nursery 90 to 95 percent of the root system is left behind.
3. On site and prior to planting remove all wires, labels, cords, and anything else that may be attached to the plant.
4. Hole size and shape have become a very important factor. Don't skimp on the width of the planting hole. Plant slightly above nursery level. Place the plant on SOLID ground...not fill dirt. Be careful of drainage. One sure way to check is to fill the hole with water and come back in 24 hours. If the water has not drained out then make alternate plans.
5. Remove ALL containers from the root ball prior to planting...even peat pots should not be left intact. Wire baskets and burlap should be rolled back into the hole at least 12 inches below planting depth after the tree has been set into the hole. It is best if wire baskets can be removed completely.

6. Backfill with loosened soil. Research shows that amendments are not necessary. When dealing with difficult sites some judgments may have to be made.
7. No need to fertilize at planting time. Remove only damaged or rubbing branches. Food production by the leaves is vitally important. Cutting back restricts leaf area and therefore food production.
8. Water the plant thoroughly then two to three times per week for the first season.
9. MULCH around the tree...THIS IS IMPORTANT!!! Natural composted mulch is best. Don't use plastic sheeting. Two to four inches of mulch is ideal. Critters will infest mulch levels any deeper. Mulch should cover the ground to the drip line if possible and should not be placed against the trunk.
10. Stake only when necessary. If the tree is staked, allow for some movement but take care not to injure the bark. Staking is useful more for protection against people.