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Even in Tough Times, Trees Make Good Economic Sense

In challenging economic times, every dollar needs to be spent wisely. This may be a time when decisions are made to wait for another year to plant trees. However, the money trees save through energy savings, increased property values and environmental benefits means tree planting is a wise economic choice for today.

With the last Friday of April being Arbor Day, make plans for tree planting. Select the right tree for the location and use good tree planting and tree care practices to save money at planting time so a tree will help save money long into the future.

Select trees adapted to the growing environment of the location and avoid planting a problem tree. When looking at price tags, it may be tempting to buy a less expensive tree species. This may be fine, but avoid buying a problem tree. Ask about a tree s characteristics and common problems it may have.

For example, pin oaks tend to develop chlorosis in Nebraska due to high pH soils. These oaks often require iron treatments to maintain vigor and appearance. Not only is this an added expense, but an untreated tree can decrease property values from reduced aesthetics and shade. Check out ReTree Nebraska at Nebraska Forest Service (**http://www.nfs.unl.edu**) for a list of recommended trees.

When buying, save money by selecting a smaller size tree. Instant landscaping has become a trend with large trees moved in with tree spades or balled and burlapped. Bare root trees and smaller caliper trees are less expensive and research has proven these trees quickly catch and surpass the growth of larger caliper trees due to reduced transplant shock.

When planted correctly, smaller trees develop fewer root problems over time. Root problems are best avoided by planting bare root trees. Container grown trees that have become root bound tend to have the most root problems later. Root problems correlate to increased inputs such as pesticide applications, low tree vigor, and tree decline and death.

Proper tree planting saves money at planting time and leads to a healthy tree providing years of economic value. Plant at the correct depth and mulch with shredded wood placed on bare soil. Do not amend the backfill soil or fertilize with nitrogen at planting. Do not overwater young trees and do prevent lawn irrigation systems from overwatering. Save money by not spending it on inputs a tree does not need.

Foresters estimate 80 percent of landscape tree problems originate below ground with planting depth being a major cause of tree problems. Avoid planting too deep by locating the first lateral root of a tree. When planting, this root needs to be just below the soil surface.

Container grown trees are often planted too deep in their containers. Do not simply plant a tree at the same depth it is in the container. Find the first lateral root before planting. Up to four inches or more of soil may need to be scraped away, along with fine tree roots, to locate the main lateral root. It is very important to cut roots growing in a circle between the container and root ball to prevent a girdled tree years later.

Once the first lateral root is located, dig the planting hole wider than the root spread but no deeper than needed to plant at the correct depth. The majority of roots grow outward, not down into soil. Loosen surrounding soil but not the soil beneath the root ball or the tree will settle too deep after planting.

Do not spend money on soil amendments, or even use a free amendment such as backyard compost, to amend the soil in the planting hole. The soil dug out of the hole is the best soil to use to backfill around the roots. Amended backfill leads to roots growing primarily in the planting hole rather than spreading into surrounding soil. It can also create drainage problems which slow or prevent root growth.

Most Nebraska soils have adequate fertility for tree growth. In general, avoid fertilizing trees with nitrogen at planting time or succulent vegetative growth can occur at the expense of roots.

Some tree care businesses offer the service of fertilizing landscape trees. In landscapes where the lawn is fertilized, trees receive adequate, if not excessive, fertilization. Fertilizing trees growing in or near fertilized lawns is questionable, unless correcting for micronutrient deficiencies such as iron chlorosis.

After planting, use mulch. Trees establish twice as fast when not competing with grass. Place a three inch layer of organic mulch in a three to five foot diameter ring around the tree, or consider grouping trees in large mulch beds with no turf. Save money by using recycled wood, such as chipped Christmas trees; and by not applying mulch any deeper than recommended.

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