PLANT LIFE COLUMN

TREE PLANTING

Trees can be planted at any time of the year; however, the fall is the best time for you to plant them. Planting trees is hard work, but can be even more exhausting in the hot, humid summer. That is why the cooler weather of the fall creates the perfect time for adding new trees to your landscape.

Trees can be added to your landscape for many reasons. One is for aesthetics. Trees can improve the appearance of the home. They can also provide shade to the house to reduce cooling and heating costs, a screen for privacy, or to direct traffic flow in the landscape. There are trees available to fit everyone's need. They come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Some trees even change their appearance with the seasons, like having beautiful flowers in the spring or losing their leaves in the fall.

The long-term success of tree plantings depends on a number of factors that all have to be carefully considered and completed. These include site analysis, plant selection, site preparation, planting procedures and post-planting care. If done correctly your tree should flourish before too long. However, as always there are no guarantees.

When selecting a site, find one that has well-drained soil and is an idea distance from buildings, keeping in mind the height of the tree you desire. Study the amount of sun or shade the area receives and the wind exposure. This will be important when you select the type of tree to be planted.

Trees should be selected that are appropriate for the environmental conditions of Central Florida and the site that was chosen. The tree's light requirements and wind tolerance should match the site conditions. Also, make sure the maximum height of the tree suits your needs and the area limits.

Carefully inspect the trees before purchase. Trees that have an unhealthy appearance, including weak and broken branches, should not be purchased. Even if they are marked down in price, they will not prove to be a "bargain" in the long run. Unhealthy trees will most likely be prone to future problems. A well-established root ball, that is not root-bound, is another quality you should look for when selecting a tree.

Dig a hole for the tree that is wider than the root ball, but not deeper. Remove the pot, burlap, wire, or rope from the tree. Gently place the tree in the hole and position it to your liking. Fill in the hole with soil and water. Make sure that there are no air pockets in the planting area and that the root ball is even with the surface of the ground. Planting a tree too deep or too high can be detrimental.

After the remainder of the hole is filled, build a 3" to 6" berm around the drip line of the tree (to the edge of the branch canopy). This will provide a basin for collecting water. Fill the basin with water. Let the water absorb and then add a layer of mulch around the tree. The mulch should not be more than 4" deep and at least 3" away from the trunk of tree.

Do not prune newly planted trees for at least one year. The root-initiating signal originates in the shoot tips of the branches. Therefore, pruning branches and shoots from a tree actually reduces root regeneration instead of increasing it, as some believe.

For more information what types of trees thrive in Central Florida, how to choose a quality grade tree from a nursery, or other plant related topics contact the Osceola County Extension Service at (321) 697-3000. Master Gardeners are available to take your phone calls Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm.

Florida Gardening classes are about to begin. "Home Landscaping Workshop" will be on October 25th, "Butterfly Gardening" on November 1st, and "Water Gardening" on November 8th. All classes will be
held at TECO, Room #7 I, on Simpson Rd. in Kissimmee. There is no charge for the classes. Call the Osceola County Extension Service at (407) 846-4181 for more information.

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