HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

IT'S TIME TO PLANT A TREE

Florida Arbor Day is January 20th, the third Friday in January. Plant a tree, expand our urban forest and help the environment.

In Florida, trees can be planted at any time of the year; however, the fall and winter 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 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 and a bit shallower (10%). Remove the pot, synthetic 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 rootball is planted at the correct depth, so that 10% of the rootball is above 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.

Water the tree frequently until it becomes established. The larger the tree, the longer the establishment period. It may take up to a year for some trees to become established. Contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners to find out specific establishment instructions for your tree.

To learn more about trees, come to the free seminar "Central Florida Trees", presented by Tom MacCubbin, University of Florida/IFAS Extension faculty. It will be held on January 11th at 1pm in the Extension Services
Building of Osceola Heritage Park. Free trees will be available for all attendees. Call to (321) 697-3015 to register.

Eleanor Foerste  
Natural Resources Agent  
Osceola County Extension/University of Florida  
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane  
Kissimmee, FL 34744  
(321) 697-3000  
Fax (321) 697-3010  
efoe@osceola.org  
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu  
Date: January 8, 2006