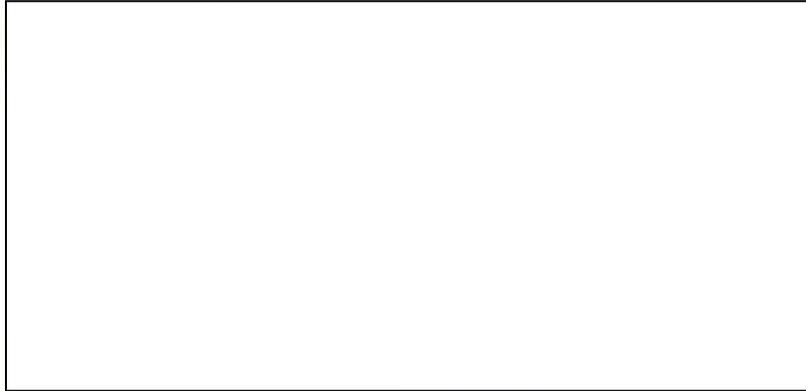


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Planting Trees for the Future

by Scott Ramsay

Everyone knows that trees are good for the environment. They provide shade, wildlife habitat, cool the air through transpiration, remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, prevent soil erosion and create fresh oxygen. Planting trees is a great activity to celebrate earth day/arbor day or memorialize a special occasion or loved one. Properly planting the tree is vital to the tree's growth and longevity. Trees that are planted too deeply in the ground or have mulch piled high up their trunks develop a problem called stem-girdling roots. At about the time the tree is reaching its prime, the stem is choked by an encircling root that girdles the tree, cutting off necessary nutrients and sap flow between the crown and roots. The area at the girdle site becomes weak and the tree becomes vulnerable to blow-down and root rot. This is a terrible waste of time, energy and money that went into planting and nurturing the tree. Be sure to plant trees properly to give them the best chance at long-term survival and protect your investment.

To properly plant a tree, dig a hole and loosen the soil to a depth and diameter twice the size of the root mass. Make sure all the roots extend straight out from the stem and do not circle the stem. Any uncooperative roots should be cut off at this time. If the tree is in a container, remove the container and loosen the root mass and straighten all roots. Cut any stem-circling roots and remove the dirt from the top of the pot down to the root flare, where the stem widens and the first roots begin. Often, containerized trees get repotted several times and have too much soil on top. Planting at a depth equal to the top of the pot will most often ensure stem-girdling root growth.

Do not be afraid to cut roots of the tree to straighten them. If left in a container too long, the plant becomes root bound and needs to have some of the roots cut to grow well. Put the plant into the hole and backfill with soil. Pack soil around roots with your foot to ensure no air pockets and continue to backfill just to the top roots. The top roots should be at top

of the hole level and the root flare should be exposed. Water the tree well to ensure that the soil settles around the roots and no air pockets remain. Put a light layer, about two inches thick, of organic mulch on the soil to hold in moisture, but do not bank the mulch up the tree trunk! Do not mulch the root flare, but instead leave the flare exposed to the air. If planted properly, your tree should never grow a stem-girdling root like the one in the photo.

If starting with bare root stock, follow the same instructions and be sure to dig deep enough to put the tap root straight down in the hole and then backfill with dirt to the upper-most root, leaving it at ground level. This is the way trees grow naturally, with their upper roots right at the surface of the soil. Planting a tree in this manner will ensure a happy, healthy tree that will grow to maturity and beyond, giving you, wildlife and the community a lifetime of enjoyment.

