

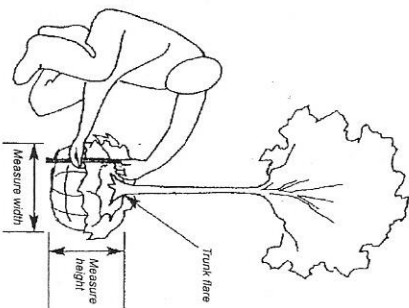
IMPROVED PLANTING GUIDELINES

Many newly planted trees meet an untimely demise because of improper planting techniques. Placing a tree's root ball too deep is often the culprit. Over the past 10 to 15 years, thanks to university and horticulture trade research, improved planting guidelines have been developed that show how to plant trees correctly. These guidelines are not difficult to understand, but they may be different from the way most people learned to plant trees.

In the past, it was widely thought that a tree had a deep root system confined within the drip line. Research now shows that trees have horizontally branching root systems that stay within the top 3 feet of soil; 60 percent of the root system, however, spreads beyond the drip line. Consequently, it is better to plant a tree in a hole that is wide rather than deep.

Also, remember that newly planted trees require supplemental water to avoid transplant shock, so water deeply on a weekly basis throughout the growing season. Following these guidelines will ensure your newly planted tree a healthy start.

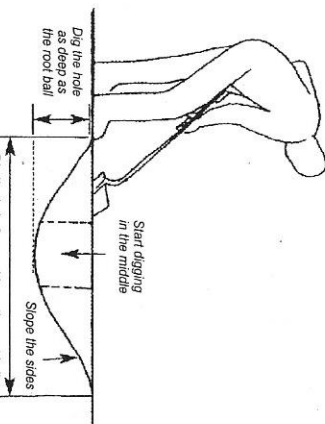
Written by Deborah C. Swanson, Extension Educator, Plymouth County/UMass Extension, and illustrated by Wendy Bowes, originally published in the June 2002 issue of *Fine Gardening Magazine*.



Step 1
Peel back the burlap and cut the twine protecting the root ball. Find the trunk flare (where the trunk meets the large roots) by pushing the soil away from the base of the trunk.

Step 2
Measure the distance from the trunk flare to the bottom of the root ball. This is the exact depth of the planting hole. Also measure the width of the root ball to help determine the width of the hole.

Step 3
Dig a hole that measures as wide and as deep as the root ball.



Step 4
Working from the center of the hole, increase its width to three times the width of the tree's root ball, sloping the sides to create a saucer-shaped hole

Step 5
Place the root ball in the hole. The base of the trunk flare should be level with the soil surface. Place soil around the bottom of the root ball to hold it in place. Remove as much burlap, rope, and wire basket as possible without affecting the integrity of the root ball.

Step 6
Fill the hole halfway using the soil taken from the hole. Unless the soil is of poor quality (excessively sandy or heavy clay), it is not necessary to add soil amendments. Water the soil to remove large air pockets and allow it to drain. Continue replacing the soil until the hole is filled to ground level. Do not cover the trunk flare. Water deeply with 3 to 5 gallons of water per inch of tree caliper (the diameter of the tree trunk at 6 inches above the soil line).

Step 7
Apply 2 to 3 inches of organic mulch over the planting area. Do not mound up or place mulch against the tree trunk.

