



The time is nearing to plant bare-root trees and shrubs

Homeowners who are wanting to add trees and shrubs to their landscapes should start making plans to grab the shovel and head outdoors in the next few weeks. The winter season is a good time to buy bare-root plants and prepare them for planting in February or March.

When choosing new plants to put in the landscape, consider bare-root plants, which are relatively cheaper than other forms because they are dug and shipped without soil around their roots, making them lighter and less costly to transport. This often is the most economical option when purchasing large quantities of plants for things like windbreaks or hedges.

When shopping for new additions to the landscape, keep in mind bare-root packaged plants should be dormant – meaning no new growth should be showing. Once you get the plant home, open the bag covering the root system and dampen the roots until planting. Keep the root system enclosed in the bag. When it's time to plant, be sure to remove the bag and any strings or wires.

As you prepare the hole for planting, make sure the root ball isn't exposed to air. There are very fine root hairs that are responsible for moisture and nutrient uptake. Being left exposed to dry air, even for a short amount of time, can kill these root hairs. Keep the roots damp and covered while planting preparation is being done.

Bare-root trees and shrubs should be planted at the same depth they were in the container or field nursery. Watch for the texture and color change between the trunk or stem and the roots. When planting, the base of the plant shouldn't be covered by more than 1 inch of soil. One of the biggest causes of plant failure is planting too deep, especially in poorly drained soil.

Dig the hole no deeper than the original root depth and about twice the spread of the roots. Go ahead and remove any broken or damaged roots. You may need to mound some soil in the center of the hole to accommodate for the spread of the roots, while still allowing the tree or shrub to rest at the proper depth while backfilling the hole.

Try to work the soil under and around the roots to remove any air pockets. Once the hole has been backfilled about three-fourths of the way with soil, fill the remaining space with water. This will help settle the soil around the roots. Let that water soak in and the soil settle. Finish filling the hole with soil and water again. If the soil continues to settle, bring it back up to grade with additional soil.

[Oklahoma State University Extension](#) has additional information on its website regarding [planting trees and shrubs](#).

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