



## Tree Planting, A Quick Guide for Homeowners

This publication is meant for homeowners planting trees on their own property.

1. **Before digging**, call 811 for a free underground utility check. Accidentally cutting an underground utility is costly and potentially dangerous. Also check to see where your septic system is if you have one. Avoid planting near it.
2. **Location**. To cool your house, plant trees to shade the eastern, southern, and western walls of your house. Small maturing trees (trees that grow up to 20' or less) can be planted 10' – 16' from the house. Large trees can be planted 16' – 22' from the house.
3. **Look up**. Don't plant under utility lines unless the mature size of your plant will be shorter than the height of the line.
4. **Do your homework**. Call the University of Florida/Miami-Dade Extension office (305-248-3311 x 228) for recommended trees for your site and needs. Or visit our web site <http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu/>
  - a. Buy quality plants (Florida Grade #1 or Florida Fancy).
  - b. Buy trees with only 1 trunk (except crape myrtles which normally have several trunks).
  - c. Don't buy pot-bound plants.
  - d. Individual palm trees don't provide much shade. Use them in groups or in narrow areas.
5. **Digging the hole**. Hire a tree hole digger if needed. Make sure the planting hole is no deeper and 2 - 3 times wider than the root ball of the plant.

### **Planting and maintenance is critical to the health of your plants.**

#### 6. **Planting.**

- a. Carry the plant by the pot, never by the trunk. Otherwise, you can damage the roots.



- b. After removing the pot, slice off the outer 1 inch of the root ball. Avoid planting pot-bound plants.

- c. Position the plant in the hole so that the top of the root ball is 1 -2" higher than the surrounding soil surface.



- d. If the root ball is wrapped in natural burlap, remove the top 1/3 of the burlap after planting the tree in the hole. If the root ball is wrapped in synthetic burlap, remove all of it after setting the tree in the hole. Remove any wire, twine or rope.

- e. Fill the hole with soil that was removed to make the planting hole. Do not add any other materials (such as organic matter, potting soil, fertilizer, etc.) to the soil. They are not needed and cause complications later.



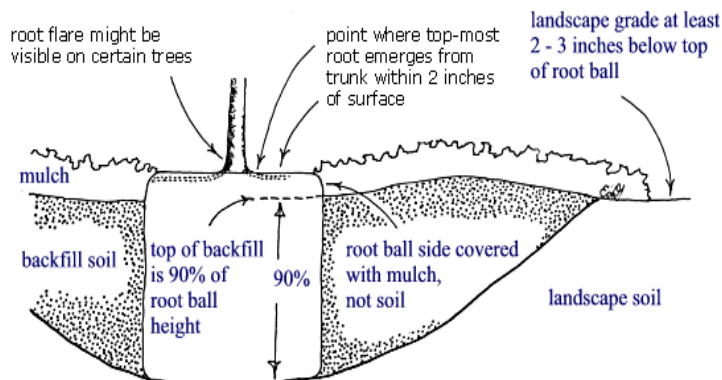
- f. When the hole is half full of soil, saturate with water to remove air pockets, then fill the hole until it's even with the ground level. Avoid packing in the soil.



- g. Make sure your tree or shrub is not leaning.
- h. Do not place soil on top of the root ball. This will cut off oxygen to the roots.
- i. Build a 3" high circular berm around the outer edge of the planting hole with mulch to catch water.

7. **Watering.** Water the root ball deeply and thoroughly.

8. **Mulch.** Use a plant-based mulch such as eucalyptus, Enviro-Mulch (Melaleuca), or pine bark, two to three inches deep over the entire planting area except on top of the root ball.



9. **Tree staking.** Stake the tree only if needed. If it is top heavy, unstable, or in a windy location, stake the tree. Remove the stakes 1 year after planting.
10. **Pruning is not needed,** unless you are removing broken branches.

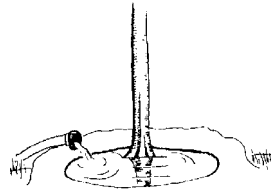
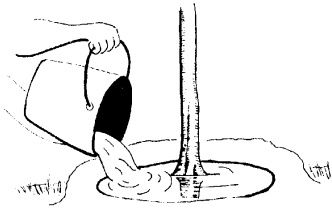
## Tree Maintenance

11. **Watering schedule.** For well-drained soils after planting (for a tree with a trunk diameter 2" or less). Adjust this schedule to take into consideration for rainfall.

Week 1-2: water the root ball every day by filling the planting basin with water.

Weeks 3-8: fill the basin every 2 days

Weeks 9-12: once a week



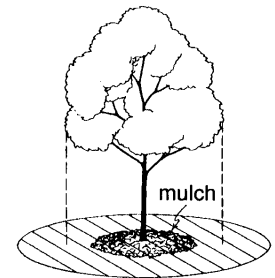
OR

- a. Water less often in the winter.
- b. For soils that are not well-drained, water less frequently. Use your best judgment.
- c. The root ball should be kept moist but not wet.
- d. Or use a tree water bag.



## 12. Fertilization schedule.

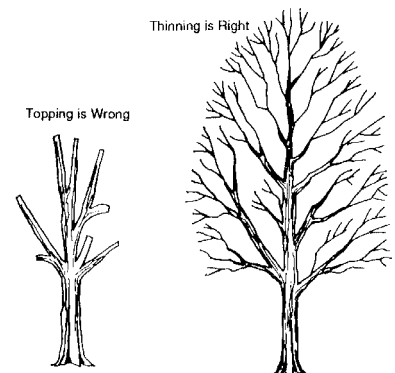
- a. Six months after planting, apply a light feeding with a balanced, complete slow-release fertilizer if needed.
- b. Broadcast the fertilizer under the drip line of the tree canopy but not close to the trunk.
- c. Established broadleaf trees usually don't need fertilizing (except fruit trees).
- d. Palms have special fertilizer requirements. Use only 8-2-12 + 4% magnesium within 50 feet of palms.



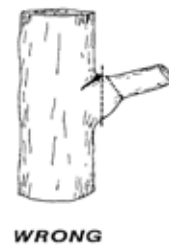
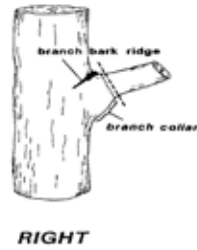
 apply fertilizer to this area

## 13. Pruning.

- a. Don't prune until 1 year after planting unless to remove dead or damaged limbs.
- b. Never hat-rack or top trees. It's illegal and harmful to the long-term health of the tree. The tree will also be susceptible to damage from high winds. Instead, thin out the canopy to allow wind to blow through. Hire a certified arborist.



- c. Trim branches properly (not flush cut).
- d. Don't apply tree wound paints. They can increase the risk of trunk rot.



14. **Never injure the trunk with weed-eaters or lawnmowers.** Place a trunk wrap or trunk protection at the base of the tree.



## Additional Information

*UF Miami-Dade Extension* <http://miami-dade.ifas.ufl.edu/>

This web site has fact sheets and publications on plants, plant care, and pests of south Florida.

*Planting and Establishing Trees* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep314>

*Pruning Shade Trees in Landscapes* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep276>

*Landscape Plant Care* <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/>

*Florida-Friendly Plants* <http://floridayards.org/fyplants/>

*Florida-Friendly Landscaping* <http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/>

*UF fact sheets on a variety of topics* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>



Photos: University of Florida/IFAS and Cornell University.

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