

Winter is a great time for planting trees!

Starting with a young seedling will help the tree establish better, but if you prefer to start with a more developed plant keep some things in mind:

Do not hold a tree by the stem. Handle the root ball carefully, because the small roots necessary for the tree to thrive are very fragile.

The top hole should be at least two to three times the width of the root ball at the base. The root system will grow more vigorously at the top of the hole. In clay soils it is beneficial to widen the hole to five times the root ball. The base of the hole needn't be much wider than the root ball, however.

Do not plant too deeply. This is a common mistake.

Trees thrive when planted at the root flare. This is the point at the base of the trunk where the roots begin to flare outwards. When a root flare is visible, plant the tree with a couple inches of flare above ground. However, the root flare may not be strongly developed in young trees that are being planted. Look for the largest roots on these trees and make sure that at least two of them are only 1-3 inches below the soil surface; this will develop into a root flare eventually. Also note, it may be necessary to remove some soil from the top of your root ball in order to find the root flare or primary roots.

Measure from the flare or primary roots to the bottom of the root ball and dig your hole to be that deep.

Do not fill the bottom of the hole with soft soil or mulch, this will cause your tree to be planted too deeply when it settles. Make sure the soil at the base of the root ball is firm and the tree is stable and vertical when resting on it, before filling the hole.

Remove the top and upper side part of the burlap sack, even if a biodegradable sack was used.

Fill the hole with the same soil that was removed from the ground. Research shows there is little benefit to amending soil or using special planting soil. While filling in the dirt around the root ball, add water to reduce the number of large air pockets. After filling the hole, water slowly and thoroughly.

Planted trees need to be regularly watered. Even though trees need less water in winter, they still need some. Drainage is important. Heavy clay soils with poor drainage are responsible for many tree planting failures. The best way to avoid this is to plant trees that can handle poor drainage in areas that have this problem.

Hackberry, Ginkgo, and Kentucky Coffee Tree are better-suited to clay soils.

Please plant trees that are suited to the area. In Norman, Chinese Pistache is an excellent, hearty tree that has beautiful fall foliage and grows to a medium height. They are rarely damaged by ice or wind, and are very drought-resistant.

You can access a list of recommended trees for Oklahoma online from okPLANTtrees at <http://okplanttrees.okstate.edu/resources/educational/pdr/tableofcontents.html>