

Tips for tree planting

Once you have decided what tree and shrub species you would like to plant and have done proper planning, design and site preparation, it is time to start planting. There are several steps involved:

- **Purchase of seedlings** – you can either buy large amounts of tree seedlings from large forestry type tree nurseries or small tree nursery outfits that sell small seedlings. If you have a few trees to plant you can choose a local tree nursery or a retail store. The key thing in purchasing is to ask where the stock came from, as many trees are not adapted to Alberta's harsher climate. Get your order in promptly as some suppliers may run out of the trees and shrub species that you want. If you don't get a tree that suits your needs, wait for next season and order in advance
- **Transport tree and shrubs from nursery to your home** – Do not leave seedlings for long time in your vehicle during hot and windy days as their roots dry rapidly. Do not expose them to direct sunlight - cover them or put them in a box. If you must wait one or two hours, cover the seedlings with snow or ice or use a reflective tarp. Do NOT use canvas, as it holds heat and warms seedlings. Having canopy on your pick-up truck also helps.
- **Handling trees and shrubs at your home or site** - The best method is to plant your trees and shrubs within few days of arrival to your home – don't wait too long as you may expose them to various diseases, moulding, drying, and many other problems. If you can't plant them immediately, store them in a cool place for few days (a cooler or cold storage, root cellar or colder corner of your shed). After a few days, check the roots - if they are dry, spray mist water and cover them again. Don't let your seedlings freeze.
- **Seedlings to planting site** –Take only the amount of seedlings that you can plant for the day. Keep them cool and moist, in the shade or under a cover and not exposed to wind or direct sunlight. If they are getting dried out sprinkle them with water to keep them moist. You can also dip seedlings in water just prior to planting but DO NOT keep them in water for long as you can drown them and cause damage due to oxygen starvation. Poplar and willow cuttings can be soaked in water a day prior to planting.
- **Planting** - The best time to plant trees or shrubs is early morning, late afternoon or during a cloudy day. Do not plant trees during the hot noon or afternoon as they will dry up very quickly. There are two common methods of planting, either manual or mechanical tree planting. Each of these methods has advantages and disadvantages.
 - For hand planting don't pull the tree out until you have made a hole. Create the hole large enough to keep roots straight. Trees should be planted in the same depth as they were planted in the nursery. You may notice changes in colour of the seedlings' bark close to roots. You will see the soil line - that is the depth that you need to plant the trees. Once you have put the tree properly in the hole, put soil around it and step on the soil to make it firm. The easiest way to test is to try to gently to pull the trees out – if they come out easily, you have not used enough soil and pressure. Keep seedlings as straight as possible.

- For mechanical planting have the soil prepared prior to planting. Regulate the speed of planting by adjusting the speed of the tractor and planter to the time needed for proper planting and spacing. You will need to have somebody go after tree planter, make the soil firm around trees and ensure that trees are properly planted.
- **Watering** – water immediately after planting. Watering can be done with drip irrigation or leaving a small bucket with holes next to the trees. Do not water too quickly as water will run off and nothing will get to the roots, or it will create surface roots for trees that may die during a drought. The goal is to create trees and shrubs with deep roots that can withstand drought. Check soil moisture regularly by putting a sharp object such as a knife into the soil. Do not water if there is some soil on the knife. If the knife comes out dry, you may water.
- **Weed control** is an ongoing process in first few years following planting. There are several methods of weed control including mechanical weed control, herbicides and using various mulches. In any case, without proper weed control you have a greater chance for your trees to die. It may require up to five years to control weeds until the tree can stand itself.
- **Insect, diseases and animals** –it is crucial in the first few years to monitor your trees once a week for any potential damages for insects, diseases and animals.

Planting trees is a fun activity but also very hard work. Involve friends and family members in planting and look forward to a beautiful reward for your hard work in your yard or future forest.



Picture: Properly planted and weed controlled shelterbelt (Photo Toso Bozic)

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