

In our climate, October and November are the best time of year to plant most container-grown trees and shrubs. Even though the part above ground may go dormant in the winter, the roots below continue to grow. This root development is a real benefit to the plant when spring winds come and an even greater benefit when the summer heat is on.

For the best success, do a little planning. First, consider your wants and needs, such as shade, privacy, or windbreak. A deciduous (sheds leaves in winter) tree makes shade in the summer and allows sun to shine thru in the winter. But for privacy, you will need an evergreen, like a pine tree, which remains green year round.

Next, do planting site analysis. Consider the space required and any obstructions, such as power lines or buildings. Consider root space. Will roots heave sidewalks or invade sewer lines? Evaluate the amount of light/heat an area receives. All of this helps you to make good choices at the nursery.

When shopping at the nursery, always consider plant health above price. Five dollars more for a plant that will thrive for many years comes out to pennies more per year. Five dollars less for a plant that may never do well is not much of a deal. Look for vigorous and healthy plants. If shopping during dormant season, look for signs of vigorous growth from the previous season. Avoid plants that look disproportionately large for the pot they're in, are girdled by tags or stake ties, have oozing sap, insects, or severe bark damage.

After purchasing, minimize root disturbance by lifting the container, rather than picking it up by the stem. While transporting, be sure to shelter it from wind and heat on the way home.

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Before selecting trees and shrubs, consider your needs and what plants will do best to serve them.

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At planting time, don't think of it as digging a hole but as digging a home. The home should be the same depth as the soil ball in the container and two to three times the width of the soil ball. For best results, I like to mix Milorganite, or similar product, with the soil from the home, using the equivalent of about one shovelful per 5-gallon nursery container.

Be sure to remove the plant from container gently. Lay container on its side, then press sides and bottom to loosen root ball and gently slide plant from pot. Inspect the roots. If roots wind around the ball, carefully unwind them before setting plant in its new home. Add or remove soil to adjust depth so top of root ball is even with soil surface. Spread any loose roots as you back fill with loose soil. Next, settle soil with water, let settle, and make any necessary adjustments to soil level and the watering well.

Some trees come with a stake in the root ball, this is fine for their brief stay in the nursery, but will need to be changed after planting. To properly stake a tree, place two or three stakes outside the root ball and tie loosely enough to allow some movement. When using rope or wire, it's best to run it thru a piece of smooth hose that will prevent damage to bark. Secure the tree at least 2/3 of the way up or at the crotch. Be sure to place ties at slightly different heights, to prevent girdling. Keep the soil moist and by next spring you should have a happy plant.

For information, see our YouTube channel at UACE Greenlee County, or you can call the Greenlee County Cooperative Extension office at (928) 359-2261 or email Bill Cook at [wrc@email.arizona.edu](mailto:wrc@email.arizona.edu).

**Hardy plants for Graham and Greenlee counties that do well with little water**