Planting Bare-Root Trees

Bare-root nursery stock is sold without an established soil ball and is generally limited to smaller-caliper materials. Some evergreen materials will not transplant well as bare-root stock.

Cost for bare-root stock is significantly lower than the same plant as container-grown or B&B stock.

Survivability drops rapidly once the plant leafs out. Some nurseries keep bare-root nursery stock in cold storage to delay leafing.

Roots dehydrate rapidly and must be protected. Bare-root stock is often marketed in individual units with roots bagged in moist sawdust or peat moss to prevent dehydration. Sometimes bare-root stock is temporarily potted to protect roots. Some nurseries maintain bare-root stock in moist piles of sawdust. At the time of sale, plants are pulled from the sawdust and the roots are wrapped with some moist sawdust for transport to the planting site. These need to be planted within 24 hours of purchase.

Techniques for Bare-Root Nursery Stock

Bare-root trees are planted with the same basic standards as container-grown or B&B stock, with the modification that the roots are spread out on a horizontal plane as the backfill soil is added. It is critical to minimize exposure of the roots as feeder roots dehydrate in minutes. Generic steps include the following:

1. Unpack roots to measure root spread. Cover or repack to protect roots while the hole is dug. Some gardeners like to soak the roots in a bucket of water for a couple of hours. However, do not leave them in the water for more than a half day.
2. Dig a shallow, saucer-shaped planting hole three times the diameter of the root spread. Depth of the planting hole should accommodate the planting depth standards mentioned previously. [Figure 29]
   - Top of backfill will be one inch above grade.
   - Generally, at least two structural roots should be within the top one to three inches of the soil surface.
   - On species prone to trunk circling roots (such as crabapples, green ash, hackberry, littleleaf linden, poplar, and red maple), the top structural root should be within the top one inch of the root-ball soil surface.
   - The bottom root should rest on undug soil.
3. As backfill is added, spread roots out on a straight, horizontal plane.
4. Many bare-root trees will need staking.
5. Water the newly planted tree.
6. Final grade.
7. Mulch, as needed

Generally, at least two structural roots should be within the top 1-3 inches of the soil surface, measured 3-4 inches from the trunk. Noted exceptions include species prone to girdling roots, where the top structural root should be within the top 1 inch of soil.
Top of soil rises 1-2 inches above grade with backfill soil tapering away.
As backfill is added, spread roots out on a straight, horizontal plane.

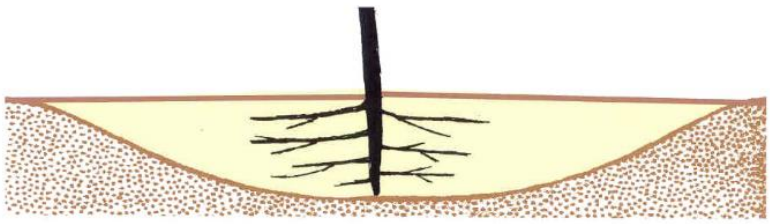

Figure 29. Planting bare-root trees
Shallow, saucer-shaped planting hole 3 times root spread.

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