

Cool Time to Plant

by Patricia Byrne

Many Texans find they have lost trees and shrubs to the cold winter and then the excessive rainfall. Heaven knows Texas usually can use rain, but it would be nice if it can at a rate that was helpful not damaging. Many trees were damaged from drought of the past few years then exposed to a cold winter only to have their root systems rotted or the soil washed away by the rains. It is important to check the health of trees that are still standing, but look a little week. Prune any dead branches that are just causing the tree to hold dead weight and others that put undue weight on the trunk and base. This improves the ability to withstand high winds and ice storms.

Was the growth of new branches and leaves normal this spring and summer? If the tree seemed stunted, check branches that did not have new growth by cutting a portion and see if it is green inside or the appropriate color and smells alive. It could just be struggling. If the tree is large and would cause damage to your house, cars, pets or family if it fell, Have a tree expert look at it and tell you if it can be saved.

Shrubs show more obvious signs of damage or disease. If they are dead in some areas but had new growth this spring and summer they may recover if this winter is not too harsh. Cut the shrubs dead portions off. When the weather is remaining low 80's or mostly 70's cut back the rest as recommended for that shrub.

Once you have determined what plants should be removed and replaced or just want a new plant in new areas, begin to search the requirements of different plants. What space is available for the plant? Access the sunlight in the area. Think about what it is like year round. Is there sufficient water runoff or too much for the plants you have in mind. There are remedies for runoff. What type of soil do you have? This is a possible source to determine your soil type <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov> or your local nursery.

Once you make your educated selection of trees or shrubs you desire to plant follow the instructions below unless instructed differently by the person you are buying from. Even then, make sure they have the knowledge and the information you have.

Dig a hole so that the root system has at least six inches of clearance on all sides. The root ball should rest on a solid soil foundation, so do not dig the hole much deeper than the ball. Plant the tree or shrub just above the level of the surrounding soil, to allow for settling and increased soil drainage.

Handle the tree or shrub by the root ball, not by the trunk after removing it from the container. A broken ball of earth can mean a dead plant. Carefully place in the hole and backfill the hole, using only the native soil removed from the hole.

Do not use soil amendments when planting large shrubs and trees. Fill the hole, and firm the soil around the plant. To settle the soil around the roots and eliminate any air pockets, water thoroughly after planting.

Wait to fertilize your tree or shrub after planting until early in the spring, and even then, go lightly. Strong applications of fertilizer may burn and injure the root system, and could possibly kill the plant.

Appropriate watering is critical in transplanting. At the time of transplanting, soak the root ball and surrounding soil. A thorough watering every 7 to 10 days dramatically increases the success ratio. Watering more often may encourage root rot. More trees and shrubs fail from over watering than under watering. Add 4 to 6 inches of mulch mixed with 5% Diatomaceous Earth Crawling Insect Control around the base of the newly planted trees or shrubs to conserve soil moisture, deter ants or other bugs and keep down weeds.