

Gardening Basics 101 - part 2 - by Mark Gilliland

In last month's installment we covered getting to know your garden environment so that you can design and grow with success (by putting the right plant for the right spot). In part two of this three part series, we will get down to business and get some dirt under our nails!

When to Plant

For most perennials, shrubs and trees, planting when dormant (without leaf) or just as new buds are appearing in early Spring seems intuitively the best time to plant. In actuality, planting in the late Fall might be the optimum time of the year since it allows your new plants to continue their root growth until the ground freezes (late December?) They thus get a several month head-start on Spring plantings! (This is one reason why dividing perennials in the Fall makes sense. Another reason is that in the Fall you can clearly see how big the plant has become and thus its easier to make decisions about next year's bed density.)

Its often best to plant deciduous trees and shrubs in winter, since they are dormant and thus hard to "shock." However, some deciduous materials (like Lilacs) are best planted when buds are breaking in Springtime. Your garden center should know the right time for your plants.

Late Fall or Winter planting of evergreen (needled and broad-leafed) materials is not recommended due to probable damage from Winter dessication.

How to Plant

Forget all the rules we learned while growing up! Recent research has shown that the best approach to planting (whether perennial, shrub or tree) is to dig a hole two to three times as wide as the plant's root ball, but one no deeper than, perhaps slightly shallower than, the height of the root ball. This is because we want to ensure that the plant's crown (perennial) or trunk flair (shrub, tree) remains above the dirt line of the bed, not buried below.

Adding some amendments to the backfill soil is OK, just don't over-do it: perhaps no more that 20% addition of organic compost is acceptable. Fertilization of the hole/soil is also generally discouraged to prevent burn damage to the root hairs. (Fertilization can begin on the following year after planting.) Some folks swear by *Roots* or *M-*

Roots which are bio-active products (not simple fertilizers) meant to enhance root growth. Experiment and see for yourself, but always read the directions before use!

If planting a shrub or tree, ALWAYS remove the wire cage and any burlap. Try to minimize disturbance of the root ball while doing this. If you don't remove the cage and burlap, you're consigning your new shrub or tree to slow strangulation, distorted growth and eventual death in a few years.

Final Tips:

Know your plant names – All plants have two names, the botanical species name and the common name. Sometimes a plant has more than one common name or several very different plant species share the same common name! Therefore, to avoid confusion, most gardeners choose to learn the botanical name of their plants in addition to the common name. An example: *Purple Coneflower* is the common name, the botanical name is *Echinacea purpurea*. Often a cultivar name is added. (Cultivars are unique forms of a species which are propagated for nursery sale.) In the example of *Echinacea purpurea 'Magnus'*, the specific cultivar is added in quotes.

Hot Nursery Picks – Here are a few interesting and unusual retail nurseries in our area (call ahead for directions and hours):

Kolvek's Perennials – 845.735.2904 – a hidden gem. They are perennial growers that sell both wholesale and retail. Lots of unusual stuff at a good price.

Pound Ridge Nursery – 914.764.5781 – pricey, but worth the visit! A fantastic select of exotic annuals early in the season. Tend to have unusual perennials maintained in good shape even late in season.

Rosedale Nursery – 914.769.1300 - the "gold standard" of local retail nurseries. Knowledgeable staff, large selection of annuals, perennials and shrubs.

Rudolf's Gardens – 845.277.4874 – another small nursery gem. Grows the latest perennials and has a full range of Hostas and Grasses, too. Nice display garden area. Cash & Check only.

Sprainbrook Nursery – 914.723.2382 – excellent selection of annuals, herbs, gardening tools, soil amendments and supplies.

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