

Plant shrubs and trees in fall

Fall is an excellent time to plant shrubs and trees.

Because the air temperature is cooling, the plants planted during the fall will not produce much top growth. This is an advantage because the energy for growth is going into producing a root system. As temperatures warm in spring, plants established during the fall already have additional roots to support the new spring growth.

Trees and shrubs grown in containers can be planted any time. But when planted in spring or summer, they often have to struggle to absorb the water and nutrients their growing tops need. As new roots begin to grow out of the container shape, they send much of the nutrients and water that they absorb upwards to be used for growth of shoots, leaves and flowers. Little is left to grow more roots.

As the top gets too big for its roots, the almost inevitable spell of hot, dry weather brings on the real test. During this time, the plant may begin throwing off foliage and abandoning branches in an attempt to survive.

If you plant now through December, with average weather, the plant has a much better chance. The key is that the roots don't go dormant. They continue to grow and develop throughout the winter. And because the top is dormant for the winter (tops of even evergreen plants go dormant) there is little demand on the roots.

Fall-planted ornamentals normally have a supply of carbohydrates and other food substances stored in their roots from the past growing season. So, with little demand from the tops, the roots are able to grow and become well established before the next spring. And, during the colder weather of winter, the roots are better protected in the ground as compared to being above ground in a container.

Fall planted shrubs and trees typically do not need to be fertilized or pruned. These two practices can cause new top growth. You don't want to encourage foliage growth, but root growth, during the fall and winter.

Make sure to not plant trees and shrubs too deeply – a common reason for stunted or dying plants. Details on correct planting techniques is available in the UF/IFAS publication "Planting Shrubs in Florida Landscapes," available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep390> or from your UF/IFAS County Extension Office.

Continue to water as needed through fall and winter. Plants can be much more forgiving if you're a day late watering them during fall and winter. The real test won't come until next summer.

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