K-STATE
Research and Extension

How to Plant a Ball-in-Burlap Tree

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Learn more about tree planting and care by contacting your local K-State Research and Extension office.

1. Dig a shallow, saucer-shaped hole two to three times the diameter of the root ball.

The hole should be wide enough to encourage root growth but no deeper than the root flare. Use a shovel handle or yardstick to estimate planting depth. See diagram below. Save the soil and use it to backfill the hole.

2. Place the tree in the middle of the hole.

Gently remove excess soil to expose the root flare. This is the area at the base of the tree where the roots and trunk merge and is slightly thicker on most trees. Once the tree is in place, remove balling ropes and the top one-third to one-half of the burlap and wire basket.

3. Hydrate the roots by filling the hole with water from a gently running hose.

Notice how long it takes water to soak into surrounding soil. If it takes longer than 10 minutes, this indicates poor drainage. Be careful not to overwater during tree establishment.

4. Backfill the hole with the soil that was removed, but do not bury the root flare.

Do not amend with organic matter. This may negatively influence water movement into or out of the root ball, and it does not help root establishment.

5. Build a soil ring around the outer edge of the root ball with remaining backfill soil.

This donut-shaped enclosure prevents runoff and holds water until it is absorbed by the root ball.

6. Water thoroughly to settle the soil.

7. Apply 2 to 4 inches of mulch evenly around the tree.

Keep mulch at least 4 inches from the trunk. Do NOT mound or create a volcano-shaped pile that can harm the tree.

Dig safely. Call 811 at least two full working days before digging to find out where underground utility lines are buried.

8. Prune broken or damaged branches.

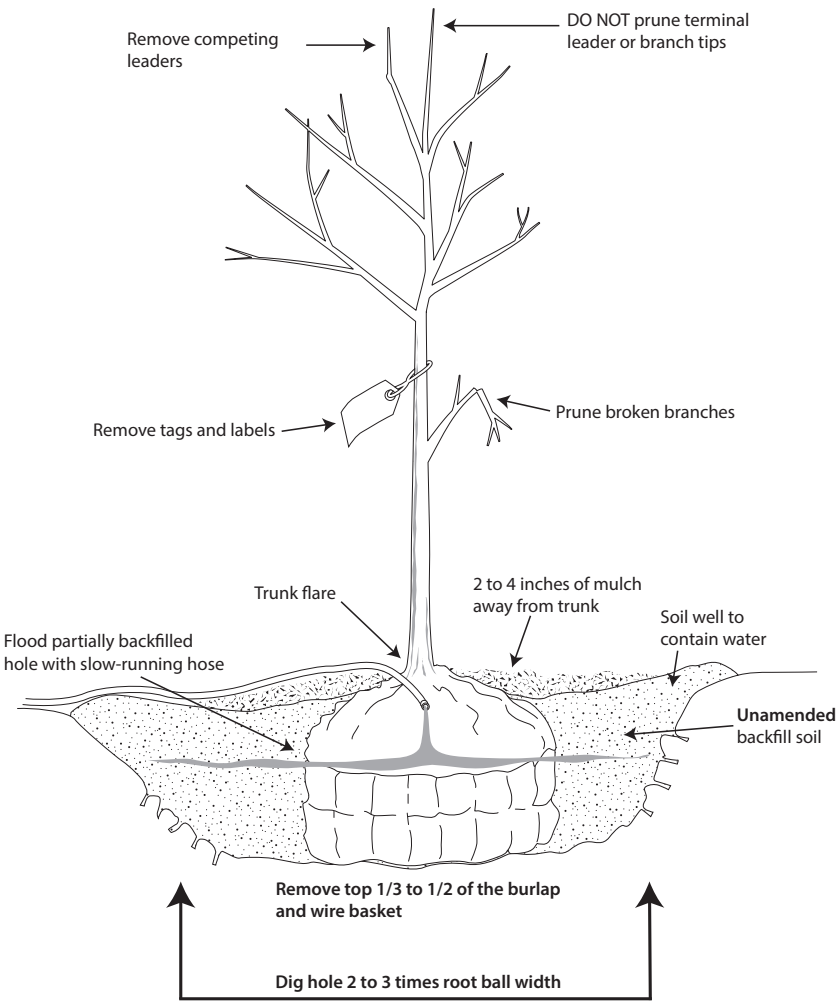
The tree should have one dominant stem (leader). Prune competing stems back to their place of origin. See diagram.

9. Stake if necessary.

Adding support low on the trunk stabilizes the root ball while allowing the top of the tree to move and strengthen. Remove after one year. See *Staking and Guying Landscape Trees* (MF1120).

10. Keep the top 2 to 3 inches of the root ball moist.

Check soil moisture regularly by probing the soil with your finger. When dry, water deeply. Watering frequency varies depending on environmental conditions. During the winter, water monthly if less than an inch of rain or about 10 inches of snow is received.



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How to Plant a Container-Grown Tree

1. Dig a shallow, saucer-shaped hole two to three times the diameter of the root ball.

The hole should be wide enough to encourage root growth but no deeper than the root flare. Use a shovel handle or yardstick to estimate planting depth. See diagram below. Save the soil and use it to backfill the hole.

2. Gently remove the tree from the container.

Squeeze the sides of the container to loosen the root ball. Cut one side of the container with a utility knife for easy removal. Do not pull on the stem as this may harm the tree.

3. Prune roots circling inside the container.

Gently tease apart the root ball with your fingers or shave the outer edge with a sharp spade or knife to release roots from their containerized shape. Left undisturbed, circling roots can restrict root growth and may girdle the stem.

4. Place the tree in the middle of the hole.

Gently remove excess soil to expose the root flare at the base of the tree. This is where the roots and trunk merge and is slightly thicker on most trees. Position the tree so the root flare is slightly above or even with the ground. If the hole is too deep, remove the tree and add soil.

5. Hydrate the roots by filling the hole with water from a gently running hose.

Notice how long it takes water to soak into surrounding soil. If it takes longer than 10 minutes, this indicates poor drainage. Be careful not to overwater during tree establishment.

6. Backfill with soil removed from the hole. Do not bury the root flare.

Do not amend with organic matter. This may negatively influence water movement into or out of the root ball, and it does not help root establishment.

7. Build a soil ring around the outer edge of the root ball with remaining backfill soil.

This donut-shaped ridge prevents runoff and holds water until it is absorbed by the root ball.

8. Water thoroughly to settle the soil.

9. Apply 2 to 4 inches of mulch evenly around the tree.

Keep mulch at least 4 inches from the trunk. Do NOT mound or create a volcano-shaped pile that can harm the tree.

10. Prune broken or damaged branches.

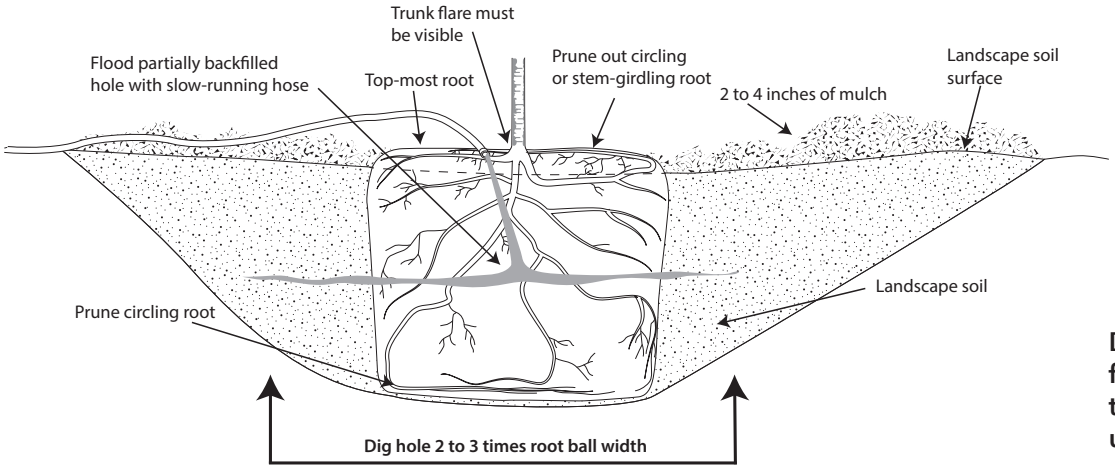
The tree should have one dominant stem (leader). Prune competing stems back to their place of origin.

11. Stake if necessary to keep the root ball in place.

Adding support low on the trunk stabilizes the root ball while allowing the top of the tree to move and strengthen. Remove after one year. See *Staking and Guying Landscape Trees* (MF1120).

12. Keep the top 2 to 3 inches of the root ball moist.

Check soil moisture regularly by probing the soil with your finger. If dry, water deeply. Watering frequency varies depending on environmental conditions. During the winter, water monthly if less than an inch of rain or about 10 inches of snow is received.



Dig safely. Call 811 at least two full working days before digging to find out where underground utility lines are buried.

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MF3313 July 2016