VERMONT URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

PLANNING TO PURCHASE A TREE

PLANT LIVE GROW

Purchasing a tree is an investment. Like buying a car, you'll want to inspect the trees at the nursery to ensure you are purchasing the highest quality. The quality of the planting stock you purchase is one of the most important factors when it comes to survival and long-term health of new trees. High quality trees will establish themselves more quickly than less healthy trees and require less pruning and maintenance in subsequent years.

Checklist for purchasing a tree

- ✓ Purchase stock from a reputable nursery. For a list of nurseries affiliated with GreenWorks - Vermont Nursery and Landscape Association go to greenworksvermont.org/members/
- ✓ Select the appropriate stock for your planting needs.
- ✓ Inspect the roots.
- ✓ Inspect the trunk.
- ✓ Inspect the crown.

Specifications help you get what you want

If you are contracting out the purchasing and planting of trees, develop detailed specifications of what you want. If the quality of the trees is inferior to your specifications, you have the right to request replacements.

What Type of Stock to Purchase?

Trees and shrubs, often called stock, vary in terms of root mass, size, relative cost, ease of planting, handling and season of availability. In order to purchase the appropriate stock for your planting project, you should understand the differences between them. Trees can be purchased BARE ROOT, in CONTAINERS or POTS, or with the root balls wrapped in burlap (B&B).

CONTAINER trees are grown and marketed in a container or pot.

BARE ROOT trees have been dug from a nursery, but the soil has been removed.

BALLED & BURLAPPED trees are dug from a nursery with roots in a ball of earth that is then bound in burlap and set in a metal basket.

Types of Tree Stock - Pros and Cons

Bare Root

Pros

- Cheaper, a third to a half less than B&B.
- Easier to transport, move and plant.
- More root system remains intact than B&B.
- Easy to inspect roots.
- Planting at proper depth is easier.

Cons

- Roots susceptible to drying, requires extreme care.
- Species, size and seasonal availability limited.
- Often requires staking.

Container

Pros

- Lighter than B&B.
- Greater species and seasonal availability.
- Entire root system intact.

Cons

- Roots can be deformed and/or circling.
- Unable to inspect entire root system.
- Contrast between potting mix and soil.

Balled and Burlapped

Pros

- Less chance of roots drying.
- Maintenance of soil root contact.
- Greater species, size and availability.

Cons

- Heavy, making it difficult and expensive to transport, move and plant.
- Contrast between potting mix and soil.
- Reduced root system, often 90-95% lost when dug.
- Difficult to inspect root system.

Examine Roots Carefully

The root system is the foundation of a tree. Look carefully at the root system when selecting trees. Make sure the main order roots, those that form the root flare, are close to the soil surface, so you can easily remove the excess soil when planting. Container trees with circling roots should be avoided, if possible.

What to look for before you purchase

ROOTS: Seek larger root systems; inspect roots - remove container if possible; avoid deformed and circling roots; soil should be firm & moist; locate main order roots.

TRUNK: Trunk should be centered on root ball; trunk and root ball should move together; examine under wraps for mechanical wounds and pests.

BRANCHES: Branches should be balanced around the trunk with 2-4 inches of new growth that is flexible with healthy, living buds. Branches should make up 60% of live crown ratio.

LEAVES: No spots, blights or wilting visible; reject bare root trees that have leafed out.

FORM: Look for single, straight leader; avoid lollipop shaped trees.

References

Hargrave, R., Johnson, G., and Zins, M. 'Planting Trees and Shrubs for Long Term Health'. University of Minnesota Extension.
Bassuk, N. and Hillman, A. 'Creating the Urban Forest: The Bare Root Method'. Cornell University.

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