

## Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

For: QA1098

I am trying to plant a berm around a tree (oblong and curved) in Sanger, Texas. We are about to start planting tulips, crocus, hyacinths and paper whites (maybe amaryllis too) Anyway, the soil is mostly clay. I was wondering if I could just maintain the soil around the bulbs and leave the rest of the berm alone as far as aerating and all. - K. B.

It is best to improve Texas our clay soils with 6" of organic matter blended with the native soil as deep as your tiller will reach. An option and the one I recommend is 3" of finished plant derived compost and 3" of expanded shale tilled into clay soils as deep as a tiller will reach. When crowned 6 - 9" in the center and sloped to the bed edges will create an EARTH-KIND(tm) bed.

Your raised berm when prepared the EARTH-KIND(tm) way should be great for spring bulbs, spring and summer annuals and wonderful for EARTH-KIND(tm) Roses.

I'm interested in planting a shade tree in our home landscape. What tree do you recommend and when should it be planted? – F. K.

Cool! Shade trees are super. And, they actually do cool the air around our homes. This cooling action reduces the summertime heat load, which also lowers our monthly cooling expenses.

The first area to install "shade trees" should be on the west side of your home. The best time to plant trees is during the fall. I prefer Oct.-Nov. but anytime in the fall is good.

It is not an accurate statement when you here "don't plant an oak tree because they are very slow growing and will take many years to grow into a shade tree". I've grown live oak, sumardi red oak, bur oak and Texas red oak at a rate of 3–4 feet per year. So, oaks are on top of my recommend 'shade tree" list in Texas.

I also like and recommend lacebark elm and Chinese pistachio. Please do not plant fruitless mulberry, Arizona ash, silverleaf maple or any other weak wooded, fast growing, problem prone trash tree.

When installing your selected tree(s) dig the hole soil ball depth only. Do not, do not, do not dig the planting hole deeper than the soil ball and back fill with loose soil to soil ball depth. Another “do not”. Do not mix any soil amendments such as compost, brown Canadian peat moss, pine bark mulch or potting soil with the removed soil.

Place selected trees in a properly dug planting hole and backfill with only loosened native soil. Water thoroughly. Stake temporarily if needed and mulch the entire planting area.

You have now planted a shade tree correctly.

I have several houseplants that we really enjoy and need your advice on when they should be repotted. – G. I.

Houseplants or tropical plants are often repotted anytime during the active growing season when they become ‘pot bound’ or the plant’s root ball is filled with roots and desired top growth is reduced or stops.

Increase the container size by 2” in diameter and utilize a lightweight potting soil. Do not use garden soil or a heavy potting soil when repotting any house/tropical plant.

The choice of container material is yours. They all work well including wood, plastic, ceramic, terra cotta and fiberglass. I have had good results with all the above.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist and Master Gardener Program Coordinator-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A & M University System, Native Texan, Columnist, Author, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom(tm). You may send your horticultural related questions to Dale at [dalegroom@mycvc.net](mailto:dalegroom@mycvc.net). If you wish free live help M - F, 8:30am - 4pm call the

Master Gardeners Help Desk at 214-904-3053.

Copyright 2006 by Groom Media and all rights are reserved.