

“Ask The Plant Groom”™ by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom™

For: QA1046

I saw your article in the local newspaper and it touched on a topic that I have been dealing with this past week. The article answered several of my questions, but I still have some that are unanswered.

I was planning to dig up a red oak in Bowie Co. and transplanting it to Hunt Co. The trunk diameter is 2-3 inches. How big a root ball is required to ensure the most success? Also, the soil is different here (black clay) compared to the very loose dirt in Bowie Co. Will this be a problem?

I currently have a silver maple in my front yard is on it's last leg. I will be cutting it down in the next weeks and either pulling or grinding the stump. Should I decide to put the transplanted red oak in the same location, can I do so immediately, or do I need to wait for a period of time?

Thank you so much for your expertise in this matter! - T. S.

It's always good to know folks are reading the column and it is providing help and some answers. This is the 1,046th column I have had published and I plan to continue through 10,046.

The time to transplant trees, shrubs or any other woody plant material is during the dormant season. The dormant season starts after the first hard freeze of the season and ends as new spring growth begins. For most of Texas Dec. through mid Feb. is the best time on our calendars. However, it is important to keep in mind that our great gardening state has six USDA plant hardiness zones and specific times vary N - S. The panhandle will have the longest dormant season while the Rio Grande valley will have the shortest.

The guidelines for soil ball size is based on the tree's trunk diameter measured 12" above the ground. For every inch of diameter make your soil ball a minimum of 10" inches and 12" is even better.

So, for a 2" diameter tree trunk the ball needs to be a minimum of 20" wide and deep. A soil ball 24" x 24" is even better. If you step up to a 3" diameter tree(measured 12" above the soil line) the soil ball diameter increases to 30" minimum and 36" preferred. These sizes should have several folks involved in order to dig, burlap, wire, lift, load, transport, unload, install and plant properly at a new location.

Trees with relatively large trunk diameters are often difficult to dig, transplant and establish in their new locations when attempted by non-professionals. What is often accomplished with great success is relocating small trees such a 1" or less in diameter. These small trees

will establish and take of growing more rapidly than their larger relatives.

Personal example here. In 1996 I had one 6" diameter shumard red oak planted by the largest power tree transplanter available. The soil ball was 6' across and 6' deep. A great looking tree ... instantly. We shot a TV show around it just to demonstrate how this type of operation was accomplished. During this series I also planted a triangular planting of three 2" diameter container grown shumard red oaks.

The 6" transplant set and set wile looking "good" each year. However the 2" container grown selections took off and put on 2 -3' of new growth each year after the 1st complete season in the landscape. Today, some nine years later you cannot tell the difference in them.

My recommendation is to go for the smaller transplants, let them have one or two seasons to establish their root systems then provide supplemental (N) nitrogen as needed. Always keep the entire root system area mulched 3- 4" deep with your favorite bark mulch plus supply supplemental moisture as needed.

Trees transplanted from clay or alkaline soil pH areas to sandy, "loose soils" or acidic H soils should dot have difficulty is - the soil drains well, they were planted correctly and adequate care is provided. This in not always true in the reverse. Trees, woody plants or others that require a acidic soil pH to grow well will not adapt well if at all when moved to soils with a high or alkaline pH.

An inexpensive soil test will let you know what the soil pH is plus levels of nutrients and provide recommendations for supplements if needed. To receive a FREE soil test kit send your request to; Soil Test Kit, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 75229 and include a self addressed long envelope with two 1st class stamps on it. After receiving the kit follow the instructions and send it to the address on the form. Do this as soon as possible.

If you need any help on interpreting the soil test results/recommendations it's available free to you by the Master Gardeners Help Desk at 214-904-3053, M-F, and 8:30a - 4:00p or dalegroom@tamu.edu

Trees may be successfully planted in existing tree locations. I do recommend the chips that remain after a tree trunk is chewed up by a stump-grinding machine be removed from a planting location and used as a mulch. If you have a depression after the stump is removed or ground refill with native soil then install your desired tree(s).

New trees may be installed as soon as the planting area is prepared after the existing tree is removed.

Good luck in your tree transplant project.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Author, Columnist, Radio/TV Host, Native Texan is also known state wide as The Plant Groom™. You may send any lawn, garden and landscape questions to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net

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