Planting Young Trees & Care

SPECIFIC PLANTING STEPS

By W.H. Brokaw

- Dig a hole much wider than the ball of your tree; 18 inches is an ideal hole. If your soil is good you need not add any soil amendments to the hole. Avoid adding more than 50% (by volume) commercial compost planting mix.
- Adjust the depth of the hole so that the upper surface of the tree ball will be 1 inch above the surrounding ground when the tree is lowered into it.
- Lower the tree into the hole; slice the container open vertically on one side, and backfill with 6" to 8" of loose soil or soil/compost mixture to stabilize the tree before removing the slit container. It is important that the root ball is not moved after the container is slit.
- Pull the plastic tube container out of the hole and away from the tree and discard it. The poly container is not degradable, but may be recycled. This will leave the roots exposed on the surface of the ball.
- Gently tamp the loose soil around the ball immediately. Promptly fill the rest of the hole with loose soil, gently tamping as you fill. Fill it up to the top, but leave the upper surface of the original ball exposed.
- It is important that the loose soil you put back in the hole be free of large clods, as these do not dissolve easily with water and will cause air spaces, which are injurious.
- The upper surface of the ball is left exposed so that you may add water directly to the ball, even after the tree is planted. If you cover this surface with anything, do not let it be soil; use sand, loose sawdust, coarse gravel, or anything through which water will pass very rapidly.
- Build a basin with a three-foot diameter around the tree, sloping the bottom of it so that all water drains to the exposed surface of the ball. The basin should have a capacity of about five gallons.
- Fill the basin with water once. If it drains rapidly, fill again. If it requires two minutes or more to drain, do not refill.
- Reform the bottom of the basin, as the dirt in the hole should now have settled somewhat. Be sure that the top of the ball is still exposed.
- It is a good idea, once the basin has stabilized, to cover the bottom with straw, sawdust, or some other mulching medium.
- If you plan to use drip irrigation, be sure that the emitter is fastened to the exposed ball of the tree with a "U" shaped piece of wire or hook. This prevents the dripper from creeping away from the root ball as the hose expands and contracts. Check your emitters frequently to see that each tree is getting watered; clogged emitters are a common problem.
- Once your tree becomes established and the roots start reaching out into the surrounding soil (usually about 1-2 months after planting), the emitters should be moved away from the top of the ball to a distance of about 6" to 8".
- As the roots extend further outward and downward, you will want to add more emitters and move them further away from the trunk of the tree. A fully mature citrus or avocado (six years old) will often have four to five emitters spaced in a ring around the tree near the drip line.
- Under normal circumstances, water the young tree every 5 to 10 days for a period of 6 to 10 weeks. Two to five gallons of water per irrigation will be sufficient provided the ball itself receives water each time and remains damp inside. Do not allow the soil to remain soggy; a happy medium is mandatory.
- If you plan to plant these trees in area where trees have died or avocado root rot has occurred, chemical control of this disease may be necessary to assist the establishment of the trees. Ridomil® and Aliette® are suitable systemic fungicides registered for use on citrus and avocados.