

# Installing the Landscape Design

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## **ELEMENTS IN CHOOSING PROPER PLANT SPECIES:**

Once you have a landscape plan for your home or site, what is the next step? Most gardeners will tell you “Right plant for the right place.” But is this simply choosing a plant whose genetics match up with the soil type, light levels, temperature range, and soil pH? If this is all you do, you have overlooked the vital step of determining if the plant choice meets the aesthetic and activity function(s) the designer intended for the site.

We must also look at the size of the plant, both now and at maturity. We need to determine its seasonal and physical growth characteristics. For example, if the goal is to provide privacy as a hedge, does it stay full to the ground and is it evergreen? Do you want a fine clipped foliage texture or a more coarse texture, or perhaps even a tropical large leaf appearance? Are the trees on the plan meant to act as a wind break or to provide seasonal color or perhaps even edible fruit?

Another major factor in selecting plants is whether or not you are able to maintain the selected plant material properly? Some shrubs and many ground covers spread aggressively and require constant maintenance to keep them in the required space or design configuration. Irrigation and regular pruning also are a major labor and cost concerns. Depending on the soil type, temperature and annual rainfall, periodic fertilization may be required.

## **SELECTION OF GOOD QUALITY PLANT MATERIAL:**

Once you really understand the design intent and have made yourself familiar with the plant species physical characteristics, maintenance requirements and other relevant considerations, then the next step is picking good quality material at the nursery. There are many elements to consider in the selection of good quality plant material. They include:

- Checking to make sure that there are not pot-bound with circling roots in or growing out of the container.
- Proper foliage color. Is it typical for the species?
- Good branching structure.
- Do trees have a single main, straight trunk?
- Is there any evidence of injury or disease?
- Is the plant container size adequate for the size of the plant material?
- Has any pruning been properly provided to maintain good branch placement and had the terminal leader on tree been preserved and not pruned off to cause multiple branching at the site of the pruning cut?

Finally, all material should have a healthy, full-foliaged, vital appearance, typical of the species with no evidence of improper handling, injury or improper pruning and maintenance.

## **TRANSPORTING PLANT MATERIAL FROM THE NURSERY TO THE SITE:**

Care must be taken when handling or transporting plant material to avoid unnecessary

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injury to the material. Careful handling will include:

- Picking up container grown plants by the container, not by lifting with the branches or trunk.
- Covering the plants, or placing them inside a van, to avoid “wind burn” while driving from the nursery to the construction site. This can cause desiccation (loss of moisture) to the plants’ foliage, especially on thin leaves, severely damaging the plant material.
- Remove plants from the container by cutting away the container. Pulling the plant free from the container may stress or destroy the plant by breaking open the root ball and allowing the roots to dry.

### INSTALLING THE PLANT MATERIAL:

There are several essential steps in the installation process that will determine whether or not your efforts are successful. They include:

- Proper layout of the Landscape Design accurately on the site. If the plant material is not properly placed as indicated on the plan, the result will likely be far less attractive. Take the time to accurately measure out and locate planting beds and specimen material to the proper size and location.
- Proper sequencing of the landscape installation. Bed preparation, irrigation installation and plant installation all need to be performed in the right sequence so as to not have one process damage or destroy the effort involved in another effort made to soon, i.e., trying to install irrigation lines and heads after installing plants and mulch.
- Proper preparation of planting holes, placement of plant material in the hole, watering in to remove air pockets, proper location of watering rings and placement of

mulch are all critical to successful establishment of plant material (Figure 1).

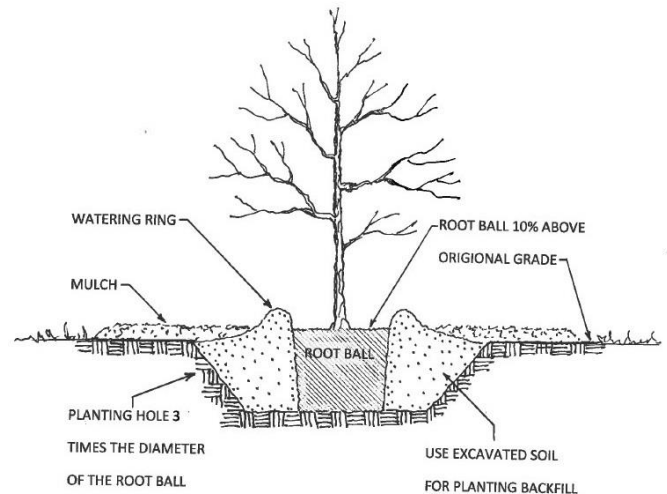


Figure 1. Planting detail.

### ESTABLISHMENT:

If all of the above steps are properly executed and performed in the right sequence, the successful establishment of your new garden will be greatly enhanced. This, however, will also depend your continuing to properly maintain the material until establishment is achieved. Establishment is when the material can live on it’s on without additional or supplemental watering except for during extended periods of drought.

### LONG TERM MAINTAINANCE:

Other non-establishment maintenance activities such as pruning, fertilizing, and occasional plant replacement will determine the long-term quality and eventual success of your gardening efforts. These activities such as pruning, structural tree management, soil testing and supplemental fertilizing, water management, turf management and pest and disease issues will be covered if additional articles.