



## May Tips

# TREES, SHRUBS AND GROWDCOVERS

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- When choosing a tree or shrub, it is important to consider the characteristics of all cultivars, keeping in mind the climate and cultural conditions of your site. Some cultivars may be resistant to diseases that are not a problem in your location, while others may show heat tolerance, pest resistance, soil tolerance, or other similar characteristics that better fit your situation. Choosing a plant appropriate for your location must be more than an aesthetic decision.
- Prune rhododendrons immediately after flowering. Old clusters should be snapped off when partly dry, but remove with care in order not to decrease or prevent bloom next year.
- When planting a new shade trees, consider whether it is messy or neat in appearance, weak- or strong-wooded, and long- or short-lived. Resist the temptation to plant a fast-growing, weak tree for quick shade.
- Some trees that are messy and weak-wooded include silver maple hybrid poplar, mimosa, weeping willow, black cherry, and Eastern cottonwood. Better choices are Chinese elm, Japanese zelkova, pin oak, red maple, river birch, tulip poplar, and willow oak.
- Rough or careless handling of balled-and-burlapped trees can break the soil ball, damaging or breaking off most of the roots, and result in the death of the tree. Never pick up a B&B tree by its trunk; instead, carry it by the root ball, being gentle when putting it down.
- If cotton burlap was used to wrap B&B tree roots, it does not need to be removed. Just untie and roll it down from the trunk until it does not stick above the soil line. If a synthetic material wrapped the roots, remove it completely if possible, or at least turn it back to expose the sides of the ball and cut it off or push it to the bottom of the hole. If the species of tree you are planting is one that grows a taproot, remove all the synthetic material or the root will not be able to grow properly.
- If an old tree shows signs of advanced rotting, remove it before it becomes a safety hazard.
- Red and silver maples, willows, poplars, and elms can clog septic lines with their roots. Plant these species well away from water lines and sewers.
- Poison ivy is dangerous all year round. You can get an irritation from the leaves, roots, berries, and even smoke from burning the vines. Learn to know the leaves so you can guard against it. If you think you may have come in contact with it, wash immediately with soap and water and remove any clothes that may have

the oil on them. Prevention is the best medicine for this ailment.

- Most evergreens have many roots near the soil surface. Avoid deep cultivation that might wound roots.
- When planting shrubs on a steep slope, be sure to mulch or use an erosion control netting if grasses or ground covers are not already present. Digging planting holes and watering the new plants will result in erosion problems on bare soil.
- Plant ground covers under shade trees that don't allow enough sunlight to sustain grass. Periwinkle, English ivy, and liriopse are a few ground cover plants that grow well in shade.
- If you are building a home on a wooded lot, save young, vigorous trees. They will adapt to changes in their environment better than older trees. Trees that once grew in shade and are suddenly exposed to increased sunlight, wider temperature fluctuations, and drying winds may not survive.
- Regularly water newly planted trees and shrubs during the first year or two after planting to help establish a good root system. They need at least 1 inch of water each week. It is better to water deeply once a week than to water lightly every day; the former practice encourages deep, drought-resistant roots while the latter practice encourages surface roots that may suffer during dry spells. Mulch to conserve moisture and control weeds.
- Prune out winter-killed wood on trees and shrubs by cutting back to green wood after new growth begins.
- Watering with soaker hoses or drip irrigation will reduce the spread of black spot in roses.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dorn, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines, and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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