

Tree Talk

Spring Tree Planting

As the weather gets warmer and the days longer, the ideal time for tree planting is approaching fast. Tree planting is already occurring in certain areas of South Dakota, and will continue through spring and the early summer months. The month of April is the best time to plant trees and for this reason, we also celebrate Arbor Day. Arbor Day in South Dakota is always the last Friday in April. We normally celebrate this holiday during the entire week by holding community tree plantings and elementary school presentations.



There are three main types of tree stock homeowners buy and plant in their yards: containerized, bare root, and balled and burlaped. Although these trees differ in the way their root systems are kept at the nursery, they need to be planted and handled in similar ways. Keeping the roots moist is extremely important. Do not let the roots or root ball dry out from the sun and wind before it is planted. If possible, plant the tree the same day it is brought home from the nursery. To aid root growth, dig the hole 3 times wider than the root ball. Digging the hole wider and shallower will help the tree establish its root system in a quick manner. One of the most common reasons new tree plantings fail is because the tree is planted too deep. It is crucial that the top most root be placed right beneath the soil surface. The tree can decline and eventually die even if it is planted a few inches too deep. Make sure to thoroughly soak the area around the tree after planting and continue to water no more than once a week during the first couple growing seasons.

Taking care of the tree after planting is as important as properly planting it. Mulch can be a tree's best friend and will help insulate the soil, retain moisture, keep out weeds, reduce lawnmower damage, and add an aesthetic touch to a yard. Place wood chips or bark pieces 3 to 4 inches thick around the tree, but not touching the trunk.

*Aaron Kiesz is the
Urban Forestry Specialist
For the S.D. Div. of Resource
Conservation and Forestry,
523 E. Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501 or
Phone at (605) 773-3594 or 1-800-228-5254 (SD Only)*