

How to Kill the Tree You Just Bought By Larry Figart

The average life span for an urban tree is only about 15 years. The greatest factor in the successful outcome of a young tree is whether or not it is planted correctly. There are lots of articles out there that help you plant a new tree correctly. Yet poorly planted trees are very common. This article will try a new approach. Perhaps if we concentrate on what not to do, we may actually end up planting correctly.

#1 Plant the tree too deep:

If you want your tree to fail, plant it too deep. Deep planting suffocates roots by restricting their oxygen supply. We can plant our tree too deep by doing the following. Make the planting hole deeper than the container the tree is growing in and pile soil on top of the root ball to even things out. Even better, if we make sure our topmost root is below the soil surface we can be sure the tree will be too deep. As the planting media the tree has been growing in decomposes, the tree will sink even farther. You know you have successfully planted your tree too deep when after planting there is no sign of a root flare.



The owners of this tree have ensured its untimely death by digging the planting hole too deep.

#2 Don't provide enough water

One of the most important steps you can overlook in order to kill your tree is to not water it. Just rely on natural rainfall and irrigation from your pop up sprinkler. That should be plenty to kill it. We don't want to waste the initial 2-3 gallons of water per day on a typical new tree. After all, the most drought tolerant trees are the dead ones.



Putting a watering bag on a tree but not filling it up is a common practice when killing a tree.

#3 Don't worry about that pot-bound tree

Killing a tree is easy when you do not worry about roots circling the outside of the container. Just pull it out of the container and stick it right in the hole. Ensure that the roots will not grow out away from the tree by not removing or shaving the circling roots. The tree will either never become established or it will blow over in the next wind storm.



Notice that there are no roots growing out of this root ball and the tree blew over in the wind. NOT cutting circling roots made sure this tree would fail.

How to Kill the Tree You Just Bought

#4 Make the Mulch Volcanoes Big and Tall

Most folks agree that adding mulch around the rootball of a tree is a good thing. However if you want to see your tree fail, you can make a good thing bad by piling more around the base of the tree every few months and never removing any of the old mulch. The higher the mulch volcano the better. This way moisture is held close to the trunk allowing disease and decay to take hold. An added bonus is that new roots will find the mulch volcano a great place to grow. These roots will spiral upward in the mulch pile creating girdling roots that will strangle the tree later. That is if it survives the mulch volcano.

Now before you decide to call the office wondering if I have lost my mind, I must admit that I am using a little bit of satire in order to make a point. My reason for writing this way is perhaps to use a little bit of humor and satire to make us think a little differently. We often times do things out of habit or because someone tells us to do it without thinking if it is good for the tree or not. To read about how to plant a tree correctly go to: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/planting.shtml>.



Big mulch volcanoes create a great place for roots to grow assuring that circling or girdling roots will be formed. Photo Credit: Ed Gilman
