

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

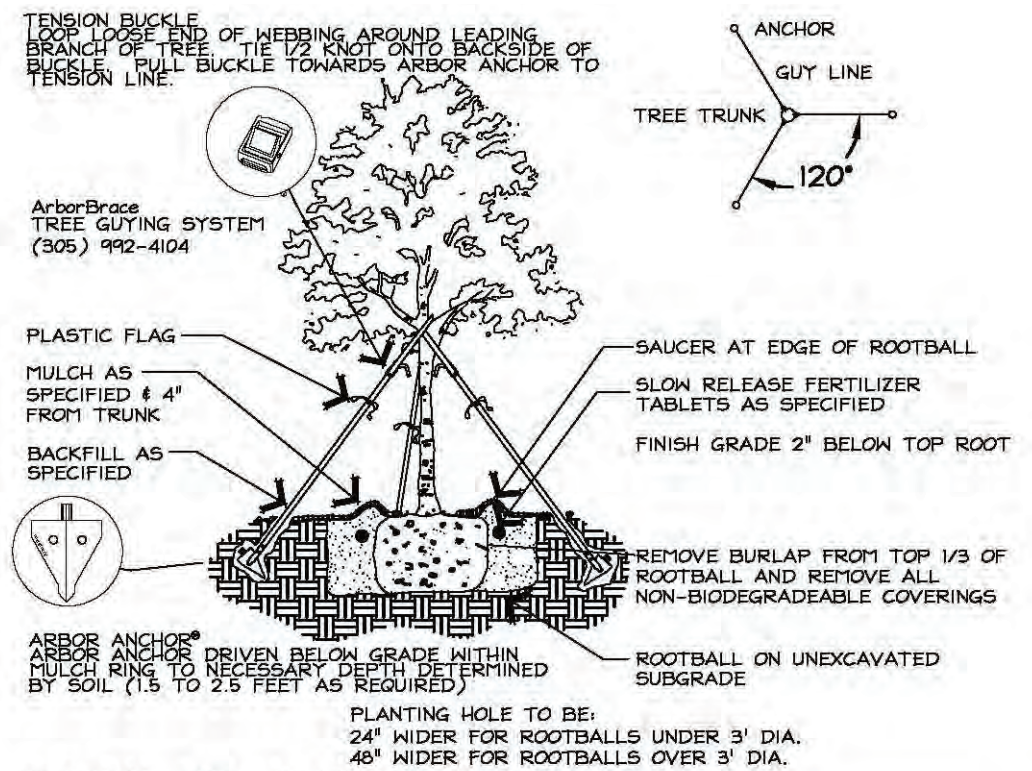


STEPHEN & KRISTIN PATEGAS

# Guidelines For Successful Tree Planting And Establishment

Use these guidelines to plant your new tree. If you hire a landscape contractor make the guidelines part of your agreement.

1. You may have room above ground for a tree but is there room below ground? Before the purchase, dig the hole so you know the rootball will fit. Be a pessimist and assume there may be large roots or utilities in the way. If there isn't another location, a smaller tree or no tree may be the result. A tree in the wrong place is worse than no tree at all.
2. As the test hole is dug, temporarily place the excavated soil on tarps or into containers so the soil doesn't get mixed up with the mulch or smother plants. Planting a tree should enhance the garden and not destroy it.
3. Remove all non-biodegradable coverings and wire baskets and even biodegradable burlap if the rootball is firm. Trees with overgrown rootballs usually languish after planting. Sometimes the tree can transcend a too-tight rootball if the roots are seriously loosened just prior to planting. Often the bottom of the rootball should be butterflied. Remove any roots that circle the trunk.
4. Find the top main root at the trunk and, if needed, remove soil to expose the root. Then to determine the depth for the hole, measure the depth of the rootball and subtract two-to-three inches so the top root ends up above the existing grade. If you dig too deep, compact the soil in the bottom so the tree does not settle later. Then dig sideways so the hole is wider than the rootball by about fifty percent. Check the depth again.
5. As the hole is backfilled, water in the soil to fill air pockets around the rootball and do not add any soil amendments or fertilizer. According to research they are not needed.
6. Place the inner edge of the three-inch-high soil saucer/donut just inside the outer edge of the rootball so water sits on top of the rootball and doesn't drain down its side. Add only a one-inch depth of mulch to the top of the rootball so water easily penetrates. Keep mulch four inches away from the trunk.
7. Oh my! Where did all of that extra soil come from? The contractor will automatically try to spread the excess soil around the site. DO NOT allow that unless you have already identified low



TYPICAL TREE PLANTING / GUYING DETAIL  
The tree planting detail found on our landscape plans. N.T.S.



The top main root at the trunk must be visible.

8. Fill the saucer with about two to three gallons of water per inch of trunk diameter every day at first during the summer or else you will lose the tree. Don't count on irrigation or rainfall, or reset your irrigation to water everything every day just to water the tree. Headed out of town? Get a battery-operated timer with a hose and test it to make sure it fills the saucer each application. See <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/irrigation2.shtml> for details.
9. Once the tree is established (about three months per inch of trunk diameter if watered regularly) dispose of the soil saucer and make sure the top main root is still exposed.

Follow all of these steps and a well-planted and established tree will be a great addition to your garden and the environment. ■

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All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis