

Apart from the hottest and driest part of summer, or when the ground is actually frozen, there is truly no bad time to plant a tree. But there is a best time, and that time is now.

It has been suggested to me occasionally that tree planting is pointless for those who plan to move in a few years, as they will never have a chance to enjoy it. The argument is based on the notion that trees have nothing to offer until they have reached maturity, which admittedly could be a matter of decades. If shade were the only benefit under consideration, that might be a valid point. Since trees offer countless other benefits, the point is thoroughly nullified. Let's consider.

Small and medium sized trees can offer great ornamental value to our gardens and landscapes within two years or less. Depending on species, they might offer colorful flowers, interesting branch structure, bright berries in the fall or attractive bark in winter.

Flowering trees may begin blooming within a year or two after planting. They can then provide valuable nectar sources for butterflies, bees and other pollinators, and the leaves may provide food for the larva. Berry producers offer a food source for birds during fall and winter. Native species are especially well-suited to meeting these objectives.

But perhaps the greatest benefit is the abundant joy that arises from watching them grow. If installed correctly in a suitable location, trees can put on a remarkable amount of growth in the first or second season.

I generally discourage folks from selecting a plant based on its growth rate. Those fast-growing trees and shrubs often outgrow their intended location, presenting significant cost and/or effort when the time comes to remove them. Even those designated as "slow-growing" will likely exceed your expectations.

All that being said, if you're not willing to learn and implement proper installation techniques, there's a good chance the result will be wasted effort. I encourage even those who are quite sure of their technique to continue reading, as twenty years of observations suggest that correct planting techniques are far from being common knowledge.

I would strongly recommend collecting a soil sample from the planting location several weeks in advance. A soil analysis will provide a tailored fertilizer recommendation for your site.

If you foolishly decide to forego this free and exceptionally useful service, then it wouldn't hurt to mix a half-cup of triple super phosphate (or a full cup of bone meal) into the soil at the planting site.

The soil should be thoroughly loosened, with shovel or pickaxe, over an area at least twice the diameter of the root ball. It's normally wise to vigorously loosen the roots, and to clip any roots that may have begun to wrap around the trunk. Install the root ball so the top is even with the surrounding grade and resting on firm, undisturbed soil. It is generally unnecessary (and

potentially detrimental) to add compost or “topsoil” to the planting site, unless you are able to uniformly amend a large surrounding area.

I’ve heard it said that the best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, and the second best time is today. I hope I’ve convinced you otherwise. The best time is always today.