



ATTS Group

Avoiding Common Tree Planting Mistakes

By Toso Bozic

Throughout my career as tree expert I cover this topic so many times during my talks. Have seen and inspected many trees where trees were planted with many common and totally avoidable mistakes. Unfortunately, many of these make common mistakes are many times main cause of tree decline or mortality. In best case scenario, these mistakes can greatly hinder the survival, growth, health and thriving of the trees. Bellow is summary of common errors and insights on how to avoid them.

1. **Selecting the wrong tree species:** Choosing the right tree species for your location is paramount to success. Different trees have specific climate, soil, and sunlight requirements. Before planting, thoroughly research, visit local botanical gardens, tree nurseries, neighbourhood, parks, farms, and consult local experts to identify trees that are well-suited to your area and region. Consider factors such as soil type, temperature, slopes, exposure, water availability, space and available sunlight to make an informed decision. There are so many tools available that can help you out in the selection of the trees and shrubs for your property.
2. **Ignoring information on soil quality and quantity:** Understanding soil conditions is one of the most important assessments prior to choose trees for planting. A tree is supported both structurally and nutritionally by its roots in the soil. Any soil limitations will result, directly or indirectly on tree survival, growth and vigour as well as future health problems. The soil's composition greatly influences a tree's growth. Poor soil quality can impede nutrient absorption and root development. Conduct a soil lab test to assess pH levels, nutrient content, and drainage capacity. Amend the soil ONLY when necessary to create an optimal environment for tree growth.
3. **Incorrect planting depth (too deep or shallow):** one of the most common mistakes during tree planting is planting trees either too deep (the most common mistake) or too shallow (less common mistake) Planting a tree too deep or too shallow can lead to various issues especially in heavy clay soils. Before placing the tree in the planting hole, locate the first level of primary lateral roots or root collar. Ensuring that root collar (root flare) should be at near or slightly above the soil surface. Planting too deep can suffocate the roots, while planting too shallow may expose them to extreme temperatures and hinder stability.
4. **Overwatering or underwatering:** Establishing a proper watering routine is crucial during the initial stages of tree growth. Overwatering can lead to root rot, while underwatering can cause stress and stunted growth. Understand the water requirements of your chosen tree species and adapt your watering schedule based on factors such as weather conditions, soil type, and tree age. After tree planting, please make sure that you provide enough water after planting.
5. **Improper or no mulching:** Mulching provides numerous benefits, including moisture retention, weed suppression, and insulation against temperature extremes. However, improper mulching, such as creating a "mulch volcano" around the base of the tree, can cause more harm than good. Maintain a proper mulch ring, leaving space around the trunk to prevent moisture-related diseases and rodent damage.
6. **Skipping weed control:** Tree weed control in first 1-5 years of tree life is a crucial aspect of tree survival and thriving and it ensures the health and vitality of the planted trees. Weeds can compete with trees for essential resources like water, nutrients, and sunlight, hindering their growth and overall well-being. Skipping and avoiding weed control and using mulching (wood



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chips and plastic mulch), regular mechanical weeding, and careful use of herbicides will lead to tree mortality and failure.

7. **Improper staking:** While staking can provide stability to young trees, it's essential to do it correctly. Improper staking can restrict natural movement and hinder root development. Use flexible ties and stakes only if necessary and monitor the tree's progress to determine when it can stand on its own.
8. **Fertilizer overuse and overload:** Applying excessive fertilizer can harm trees rather than benefit them. Once you do proper soil testing and choosing appropriate tree species you don't need to use any fertilizer after tree planting. Avoid fertilizing during periods of drought or extreme weather conditions. Don't fertilize trees and shrubs after July 15.



Picture 1. Improper tree planting and staking -planting too deep (L) and small planting hole (C) lead to root bound and tree mortality (R).

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