

I've heard fall is the best time to plant trees and shrubs. Is this true? LK In some ways, this may seem counter-intuitive, but fall is indeed the best time to plant most trees and shrubs. The reason for this is that trees and shrubs planted at this time have the fall, winter and spring to develop a healthy root system before our Oklahoma summer arrives. The best way to help a young tree or shrub acclimate to its new home is to dig the hole two to three times the diameter of the root ball and no deeper than the root ball itself. If you have hard clay soil, you should plant trees and shrubs 1-2 inches above grade. For sandy soils, plant at grade level. Plan on keeping a 4- to 6-foot grass-free mulched circle around young trees or shrubs for at least 2-3 years. This mulch should be 2-4 inches deep. Be sure to use some kind of organic mulch, such as compost, bark, grass clippings or straw. Do not use plastic under the mulch to prevent weeds, as this will limit your tree's or shrub's access to water. New trees and shrubs have a limited ability to utilize fertilizer until they have an established root system, therefore, fertilization is often not recommended at the time of planting. Optimally, young trees and shrubs can be fertilized from March through July. But, before adding fertilizer, we recommend you get a soil test from the OSU Extension so you know which elements are needed in your soil. On average, young trees and shrubs need 1 inch of water per week whether this comes from rain or hand watering. In dry conditions, newly planted trees and shrubs may need to be watered 2-3 times per week as their root systems have not developed to the point where they can replenish the water they are losing through their leaves. Some young trees will need to be staked if top heavy or planted in windy areas. If this is the case, use only the quantity of stakes necessary and leave it a little bit of room to move, as this is how the trunk develops strength.

When stakes are left in place longer than 2 years, the tree's ability to stand on its own will be compromised. Young trees with thin bark, such as ash, birch, linden or maple, should have their trunks wrapped with a paper tree wrap during winter for the first two years if they are exposed to the southwest winter sun. The heating and cooling by the sun during winter can cause bark damage from which the tree never recovers. We have quite a bit of information at our Diagnostic Center on varieties of trees and shrubs that do well in our area. Give us a call or drop by; we would love to help you find the perfect addition to your home. You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, dropping by our Diagnostic Center at 4116 E. 15th St., or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org. Sara Stephenson 918-581-8307 sara.stephenson@tulsaworld.com