

## Fall Transplanting

Fall is prime time for planting and transplanting trees. Fall's warm soil encourages root growth, while shorter cooler days decrease transpiration. Up to 80% of root growth takes place in the fall. Even after the tree has gone dormant, roots keep expanding until the ground freezes over.

If you have a small tree that you've been itching to move, do it after the leaves turn color or drop but before the soil freezes. The smaller the tree, the more successful you will be. Moving a tree larger than two inches in diameter is risky. Trees over 3-4 inches in diameter require skill, experience, and special equipment. Because roots of large and small trees grow at about the same rate, the larger tree takes several years to regain the size of its original root system; a smaller tree will take a fraction of the time.

First decide where the tree will be replanted---making sure it will have plenty of room to reach maturity. Dig the hole much wider and some deeper than you think you'll need, then rough up the sides of the hole.

Now tackle the tree. Measure the trunk diameter 6 inches above the ground and multiply that measurement by 12. This is the size to dig the rootball. So a 1 ½ inch trunk needs a rootball 18 inches wide. I dig mine even wider, knowing that as much as 95% of the roots are left behind in most transplanting projects. Using a sharp shovel, slice through the roots on the perimeter of the rootball. Because most roots are in the upper portion of the soil, the rootball depth need not increase in proportion to the width. The ball has been dug deep enough when root density decreases markedly--a depth of one foot is usually adequate for small trees.

Using shovels, boards, and hands (not the trunk), shift the tree onto a tarp, keeping the rootball as intact as possible. Immediately drag the tree to its new, pre-dug home. Settle it in at the same depth it was growing in its original site. You may need to add more soil to the bottom of the hole. Planting too deep is worse than planting too high. Spread any exposed roots out radially in the hole, and place soil carefully and firmly around the roots. Water to settle soil and remove air pockets, and add additional soil as needed. Then give one last good watering with a slowly dripping hose. Add 2 or 3 inches of mulch on top of the rootball to retain moisture and modify soil temperatures. Remember to deep water whenever the rootball is dry.

When spring arrives your tree will be in its new home, ready to make the most of great growing weather.

*~ Sandra Thorne-Brown, a Pocatello Tree Commission member, is an urban forester.*