

LANDSCAPE ORNAMENTAL SERIES

A Guide for Louisiana Landscape Professionals



Proper Balled-and-Burlapped (B&B) Tree and Shrub Care

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What is B&B?

Balled-and-burlapped plant material is dug out of the ground with the soil immediately surrounding the roots remaining undisturbed. The root ball with the original soil intact is then wrapped in burlap. This process allows the transport of healthy trees and shrubs to the consumer or landscape with intact roots and soil. There is a common misconception within the landscape industry that balled-and-burlapped plants tend to have productivity issues after transplanting into the landscape. When proper care is taken, balled-and-burlapped trees are extremely hardy in the landscape and can experience reduced transplant shock.

Nursery handling

As with any growing style, starting with quality plant material is crucial. B&B plants are dug from the ground, and the roots are wrapped in burlap and tightly packed. A wire cage is used to hold the roots in place. After being dug, plants can be “cured” or “hardened off” for 10 to 14 days prior to delivery. This curing period is especially important for evergreens because these are the most likely to suffer digging stress. As with most woody landscape plants, fall and winter are great times to dig and transplant balled-and-burlapped trees because of dormancy. Balled-and-burlapped trees can be stored in shady areas safely for weeks to months if properly watered and cared for prior to sale and planting. Once sold, it is important to secure the branches of the trees to prevent damage during transportation.



Trees and shrubs can be dug by hand or by using heavy machinery.

Landscape Handling and Planting

Never handle balled-and-burlapped material by the top or trunk. This will loosen the root ball from the trunk and reduce the contact between the roots and the soil, which is vital to the survival of the tree. Balled-and-burlapped material should be moved using transportation straps or by carefully rolling the plants. Once at the job site, ensure that plant material remains in an upright position and in the shade prior to planting. If shade is not an option, cover the plant material with fabric to prevent leaf scorch. Keep the root ball watered sufficiently prior to installation. The planting hole should be dug two to three times as wide as the root ball and slightly less deep than the root ball. It is important that the root collar, or the area where the roots attach the trunk, remains at or slightly above ground level. If possible, dig a saucer-shaped hole. Slight tilling of the soil inside the hole will help promote rapid root growth. A hole that is not wide enough may cause the roots to “girdle,” or wrap around and constrict the trunk.



Rootballs are wrapped in burlap and caged with a wire to hold in place.

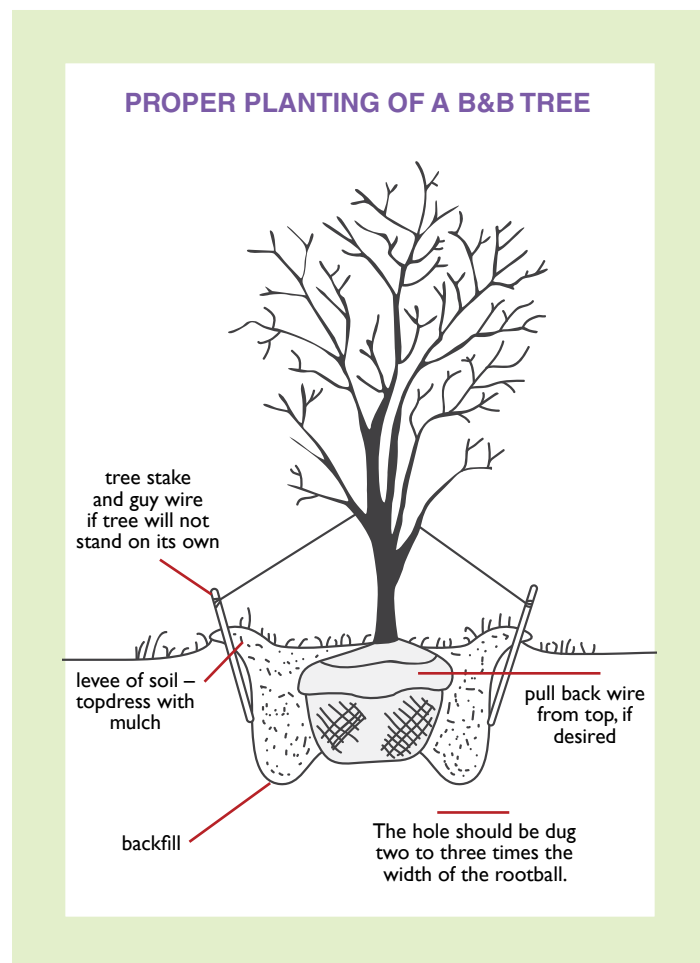
Place the tree in the center of the hole and position upright. It is not necessary to remove the wire basket. The wire basket may be cut at the top, but removal can damage the root ball. Nails used to pin the burlap may be removed to pull the top of the burlap and expose the root ball if desired. If you must remove the wire basket, cut the basket in multiple locations. Do not, under any circumstance, attempt to pull the wire basket off without cutting, as this will damage the root ball. If traditional burlap is used, this material should be left in place on the root ball,

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as it will decompose. This will ensure proper root health of your new tree or shrub. Synthetic or vinyl burlap will need be removed from the root ball because this will not decompose. The only time that the wrapping needs to be removed is if synthetic or vinyl burlap is used, as these will not decompose. Be sure to check with your grower to determine which type of burlap is used. Backfill soil into the pit and pack firmly around the root ball until the soil level is just below the root collar. Thoroughly soak the tree pit directly after planting, approximately 5 gallons for every inch of trunk diameter is suggested. It is recommended to provide a layer of mulch at least 2-4-inches deep for the radius of the dug hole to help conserve soil moisture and control weeds. Mulch should not be piled directly on the trunk of the tree to prevent rotting.

Post-Planting Care

The vast majority of landscape plants that do not survive the first year die due to improper watering. It is optimal to use drip irrigation for the planting of trees. Plants should be irrigated two to three times a week on average with enough water to sufficiently wet the area. Often, hand watering through a hose will not wet the soil to the depth of the root ball. Landscape trees tend to need more water than expected for the first few months. If planted in the summer or hot season, even more water is required. It should also be noted that during periods of heavy precipitation, irrigation can be reduced or stopped entirely until the rain slows.



For more information on B&B tree care, please contact your local LSU AgCenter extension office.



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Pub. 3686-A (online) 6/19

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