KINGMAN IS GROWING! Column

PLANTING BARE ROOTED PLANTS - - SUCCESS OR FAILURE?
By Rob Grumbles, Extension Agent, Agriculture

Barerooted plants are dug from the growing grounds without any soil remaining around the root system.

This method of handling plants is generally limited to deciduous plants, which shed their leaves during the winter months.

Many of our shade trees, fruit trees and roses lend themselves to this method of transplanting.

Availability of barerooted plants is limited to the winter season when plants are devoid of leaves and are in a dormant condition. When a nursery receives a shipment of barerooted plants, they are placed in a “healing in pit” which contains sand, sawdust, peat moss or similar material. This maintains moisture around the root system and makes it possible to remove plants with ease.

Failure of plants to revive in the spring, after transplanting by the bareooted method, can be attributed to many factors, and home gardeners play an important role in reducing loss or recovery of plants by observing a few simple rules.

1) PLANT EARLY - Plants are received by nurseries shortly after they go into a dormant condition in the growing grounds. They are placed in the “healing in pits”, and they remain in the pits until buds begin to swell in late spring. They are then placed in containers containing soil and the cost of individual
plants will be higher than for the barerooted ones. Late in the season dormant plants start producing fine root hairs. These root hairs play an important role in recovery of the tree and it is best if this development takes place while the tree is planted in the yard rather than in the pits. Ask the nursery to notify you when the barerooted plants arrive.

2) PACKAGED PLANTS REQUIRE INSPECTION - Some barerooted plants, especially roses, are sold in packages. The root system is encased in a water-absorbing material and the tops are exposed. Some garden centers are careless in checking the packages for moisture and this may result in the death of plants. Dead plants will have shriveled bark or discolored stems. If packaged plants are purchased shortly after they arrive at stores, danger from lack of root moisture will be lessened.

3) PROTECT THE ROOTS - After purchasing barerooted plants from nurseries, protect the root system from drying while transporting plants home. Even though the plant is dormant, the root system can be damaged by exposing it to drying winds. Place the root system in a container of water or place moist soil around the roots after you arrive home and allow it to remain protected until planted in the selected site.

4) BE PREPARED FOR PLANTING - Always have the tree hole prepared ahead of time so you can plant the tree or shrub immediately after arriving home. Many failures can be attributed to delays or improper storage. It is also good to fill hole with water to check drainage.

5) AVOID ROOT CONTACT WITH UNDECOMPOSED MANURE - Tree holes should be prepared several weeks in advance of planting especially if manure is being used in the soil mix. Manure and soil should be mixed at a ratio of approximately six (6) shovels of soil to one (1) shovel of manure; mix thoroughly before back filling. If there is not sufficient time to allow the manure to decompose, peat moss or wood bark materials can be used at the same ratio as the manure; 6 soil to 1 peat moss. Peat
moss can be in contact with roots with no danger of damage. To avoid any possibility of burning with undecomposed manure, fill in around the roots with soil that does not contain manure.

6) WAIT FOR NEW GROWTH BEFORE FERTILIZING - It is best to apply mineral fertilizer when the plants begin to leaf out. Newly planted trees and shrubs can be injured by over fertilizing.

7) DO NOT BURY THE GRAFT UNION - Many plants are grafted on appropriate rootstocks, and the area where the rootstock is grafted can be detected by the characteristic bend. The graft union should be approximately two (2) inches above the established soil line.

8) WATER IMMEDIATELY AFTER PLANTING - Water to settle the soil and remove air spaces. Additional soil may be needed after the initial watering.

9) PRUNE AND SELECT SCAFFOLD BRANCHES - Some deciduous trees and shrubs are sold with the entire top left intact. It is important to reduce top growth by 50% and to select scaffold branches on tree consisting of not less than three, nor more than five.

NOVEMBER 13TH THE KINGMAN AREA MASTER GARDENERS WILL BE HOLDING A WORKSHOP ON “PROPERLY STAKING AND PLANTING TREES”. LOCATION TBA.

For more information contact The University of Arizona Mohave County Cooperative Extension at 101 E. Beale Street, Suite A, Kingman or telephone 928-753-3788.

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