

# Success with Planting

**W**hen you buy plants generally you are investing in the future and so it is not surprising that you will want success, with minimum effort. Success should be measured not just in terms of whether a plant lives or dies, but equally important is that the plant establishes itself quickly and thrives. A plant that establishes quickly will start to grow quicker, in some cases flower earlier and more strongly and be more resistant to stress caused by drought, waterlogging, pest and disease. Containerised trees can be planted at any time of year.

If you are contemplating planting a shrub or tree in an area that was previously planted the ground will need to be well cultivated and new organic matter such as compost worked into the soil, which helps open up the soil structure, letting in air and water. The previous plants would have been removed a lot of the nutrient leaving an impoverished soil, particularly if they were large conifers. Nutrients will also need to be added, in the form of a good balanced fertiliser such as Fish, Blood and Bone at the cultivation stage, this is not suitable for ericaceous plants such as Rhododendron, where only a special ericaceous feed should be used.

Where trees or very large shrubs or conifers have been removed it is essential that all the roots are removed and any residual stump is root ground. The chippings that result from felling or grinding should be removed, as fresh wood can lock up any nutrients present, making it harder for an establishing plant to take up the nutrients it requires.

Many books recommend the application of bonemeal to a planting hole before inserting the tree, to encourage rooting, however I generally use a tree planting compost called *TPMC* which has a balance of nutrients present, for quick establishment.



Some of you may also have come across an additive called mycorrhizal fungus which is recommended for application to the planting hole during planting. There are different trade names but the one that my landscapers use is *ROOTGROW*. This additive is a cocktail of friendly fungi that work with plants, enabling them to source nutrients and water quickly. They establish a network of threads that act as a secondary root system, extending quicker and over greater distances than the root system could do on its own. The beneficial effects are quicker establishment and therefore reduced losses and better growth in the newly planted trees. The benefit has been so dramatic that we use it in all our planting works and even the RHS has endorsed this particular brand.

I always advise the insertion of a watering pipe or irrigation tube, alongside the rootball which is a piece of perforated pipe which allows the water to percolate around it. Watering the soil on the surface is a more inaccurate method as much of the water that is applied to the surface in this way isn't available to the roots and in some cases is unable to penetrate into the soil at all, particularly in very dry weather. Most trees would require a very good watering at least once a week in dry conditions to avoid stress.

Finally trees need support in the form of staking, the reason for this is to reduce the likelihood of the rootball moving in winds, which would cause any new roots, many too small for the eye to see, to be damaged. The type and size of the stakes to be used will vary with the size and shape of the plant to be planted. Even the experts cannot always agree. I tend to advise the use of a single stake, of various sizes, for small trees and shrubs, progressing to a double stake and cross rail for bigger trees or even root anchors on the biggest trees or where the site is exposed or the client doesn't want visible staking. Root anchors are special bits of kit comprising anchors of various size with strong metal cable that goes over the top of the rootball, stopping it moving, they are best applied by professionals.

*For more information or help with your planting contact The Big Plant Centre at Pantiles, Almnors Road, Lyne, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0BJ or call 01932 872195 or visit the website at [www.bigplantcentre.co.uk](http://www.bigplantcentre.co.uk).*

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