

## How To Avoid Five Common Planting Mistakes

by Rachel Johansen, owner of Rachel's Gardens

### 1. Allow enough planting room for the plants to grow.

Before planting, know the mature size of the tree or shrub you're putting in. If the tree will mature to 40ft tall and 20ft wide, a minimum of 12ft should be allowed next to any structure or existing plant to give the tree space to spread out. Look overhead for any obstacles that may eventually obstruct the growth as well. Likewise, a shrub that's going to get 6ft wide should not be planted right next to the foundation. Plant it at least 3ft away from the house, or you'll end up with a 3-sided specimen from constant pruning in an effort to keep it under control.

### 2. Dig a large enough hole & mix the soil with organic material before planting.

Too often when I transplant existing plants and shrubs, I discover the root ball has not spread out due to poor soil conditions and crowded planting. The planting hole for a ball and burlap plant needs to be at least one and a half times the size of the ball and mixed with organic matter (e.g. peat moss) because the plant has had its roots cut when dug and now needs room in order to stretch for new root growth.

### 3. Check the light requirements of trees and shrubs before planting.

A plant may survive in the wrong light, but it will not perform to its best potential. A sun-loving plant put in shade has little or no color as intended, and a shade-loving plant will shrivel and look bleached-out in the sun. Last summer I transplanted a Burning Bush that had been planted several years ago in a shady location too close to the foundation. The plant had not grown well, and didn't have the bright red fall foliage that this shrub is known for. Once re-located, the plant took off, and was brilliantly red for the first time last fall.

### 4. Avoid the use of landscape cloth.

In my opinion, the cost and effort of using landscape cloth is not worth the results. The first year the cloth is effective in keeping weeds down, however the mulch covering the cloth decomposes in the second year. This decomposed mulch provides a rich humus that is a perfect home for weeds to grow in the following year, so you end up with a layer of weeds growing in the decomposed mulch layer on top of the cloth. Plus, the cloth must be cut to install any new plantings. Eventually the cloth ends up being pulled out because of its ineffectiveness. My advise is to use it sparingly if at all.

### 5. Water, water, water, new plantings!

After I install a new garden, tree, or shrub, I remind homeowners that the plants have young, or reduced root systems which can dry out quickly. The plants are also accustomed to frequent waterings at the nursery or garden center, and will go into shock if allowed to dry out once installed in the home landscape. Water deep, long and regularly until they can endure longer periods – usually in a couple of weeks.