



Bookcliff Gardens

nursery & landscape

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Planting A Ball And Burlap Tree

Getting Ready

It's important to be prepared to handle a B&B tree. They are very heavy and awkward. Care must be taken so that neither you nor the tree is hurt during this process. Make sure that you have enough help to unload and move the tree once you get it home; it usually takes two to four strong people to handle one of these trees.

Unloading

Getting the tree out of your vehicle is the first challenge you'll face. B&B trees weigh between 300 and 500 pounds, so it's not something most of us can just pick up and unload. Dropping the tree off the tailgate of the pickup will damage the rootball, causing stress to the plant, delaying establishment and perhaps leading to the loss of the tree. We recommend using a long, thick (at least 2" thick) plank to form a ramp that the tree can be slowly slid down. This usually requires two or three or even four strong people. Stand the tree upright on the top of the plank, and carefully slide it down the plank, only using the wire cage around the rootball to pull on. Take it slow and easy.

Moving The Tree

Once you've gotten the tree off of the truck, you'll need to move it to the location in your yard where it will be planted. Obviously, the best solution would be to back your truck up to the hole and unload it there. If this isn't possible, use a wheelbarrow or a heavy duty cart to put the tree on to move it around to where you need it.

Planting The Tree

The first step in planting the tree is to dig the hole. You'll want to dig a relatively wide but shallow hole. Use a tape measure to make sure you're digging the hole to the correct dimensions. The width of the hole should be at least 20"-24" bigger in diameter than the widest part of the rootball of the tree. This will give you a 10"-12" wide gap between the edge of the hole and the rootball. An even wider hole is better as it gives you more room to work when planting the tree as well as increasing the volume of soil that's being amended. The depth of the hole should be dug in relation to the size of the rootball. You want to dig the hole deep enough so that the "shoulder" of the rootball is even with your ground level. This will put the base of the tree's trunk several inches above grade level. Do not dig the hole deeper than necessary. If the hole is dug deeper and then filled in to accommodate the tree, the tree can settle, leaving the tree too deep, or throwing it out of plumb.

Once the hole is dug, you need to gently roll the tree into the hole. Again, it requires a couple of people. One slowly rolls the rootball to the edge of the hole while the other holds the rootball of the tree. As the ball slowly and gently begins to roll into the hole, pull the tree around by the wire cage around the rootball so the bottom of the rootball is pointed into the hole and the rootball can slide down into the hole. Shift the tree by the rootball so that it's centered in the hole, verifying the dimensions of the hole once again. Get the tree turned the way you want it, and get it plumb. Once the tree is perfectly placed, place three or four shovels of amended soil around the very bottom of the rootball. Firm it well with the handle of your shovel to secure the tree in place. It's very important that the tree is positioned exactly as you want it before proceeding with the planting.

Next, you need to remove the top half of the wire cage surrounding the rootball. There is some disagreement about how much, if any of the wire cage should be removed when planting a B&B tree. We believe that removing the top half of the cage is the best compromise. It's very important to remember that once the cage is removed, **the tree cannot be moved** without grave risk to the tree. Bolt cutters work best to cut the cage, though a hacksaw will do the job. Before cutting the cage, cut all of the twine off of the top of the rootball and remove it. Then cut all of the vertical wires below the second or third horizontal wire. Cut through the two or three horizontal wires, and now you can spread apart the top of the cage and remove it.

The burlap needs to be removed from the top of the rootball. It can be cut with a sharp utility knife and discarded, or you can "unpin" it and roll it down into the hole and bury it where it will decompose in time.

Finally, backfill the hole with a blended mixture of 2/3 soil from the hole and 1/3 Soil Pep or Peat Moss. With the extra soil from the hole, build a basin that will hold 3" to 4" of standing water. Give the tree a good deep soaking in with water and after the water has soaked in, soak it a second time with a solution of **Fertilome Root Stimulator** mixed with water according to the label directions. If the tree is in a lawn or in an area where it will receive lawn watering, remove the basin after the Root Stimulator has soaked in.

It is strongly recommended that you stake a B&B tree for the first year after it's planted. Because of their size, they can be knocked crooked by winds, or settle a little off-kilter. Staking them will help hold them plumb and stable until roots grow out to anchor the tree down. We recommend using steel "T" posts to tie the tree straps to. The stake needs to be strong enough to support that large and heavy tree. Remove the stakes and ties after one year.