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Instruction for Planting Trees and Shrubs
Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
Home and Family Series
Harold Davidson, Department of Horticulture
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Instructions for Planting Trees and Shrubs



Extension Bulletin 592 — Home and Family Series

BY HAROLD DAVIDSON
Department of Horticulture



YOU ARE ABOUT TO PLANT one of nature's finest gifts to man. If you plant it properly and provide a little care, the plant will grow and provide beauty and enjoyment for years to come.

If the plants are bare-root, when you receive them, keep them in a shaded location and protect the roots from dehydration.

Follow these instructions in planting:

1. Dig a hole about 12 inches wider than the spread of the roots or the diameter of the pot or the ball. The depth of the hole should be:

(a) For potted or balled plants — the same depth as the soil mass plus one inch.

(b) For bare-root plants — deep enough to contain the roots and establish the plant at the same level that it was growing previously. A soil line will be visible on the stem of the plant.

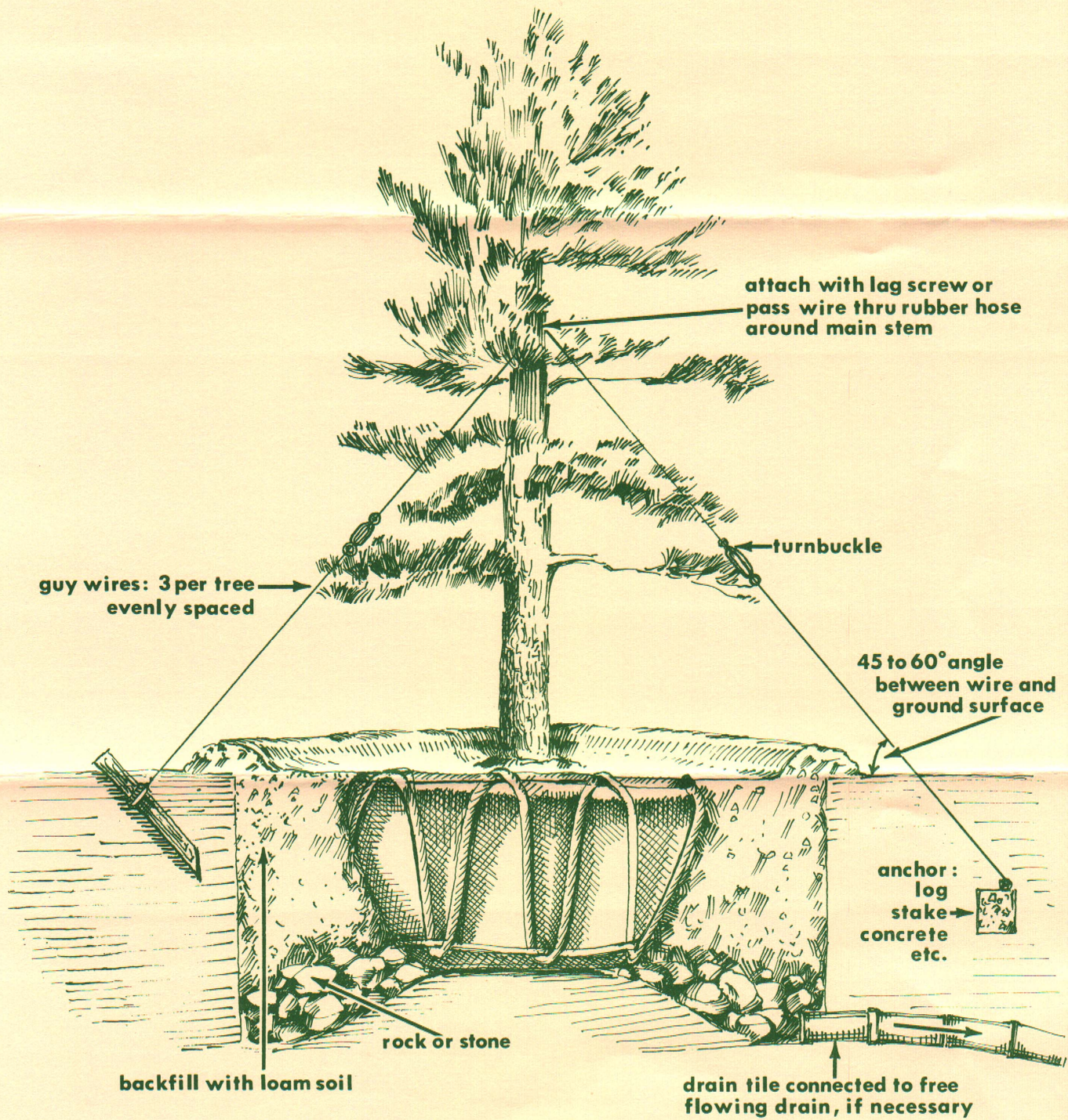
2. If the soil is a heavy clay, it will be necessary to provide drainage, since most trees and shrubs do not grow well with excess water about their roots.

(a) If the site has a sandy subsoil, this might be used for drainage by boring a hole through the clay to the sandy subsoil. Fill this hole with gravel or sand and proceed to the third step.

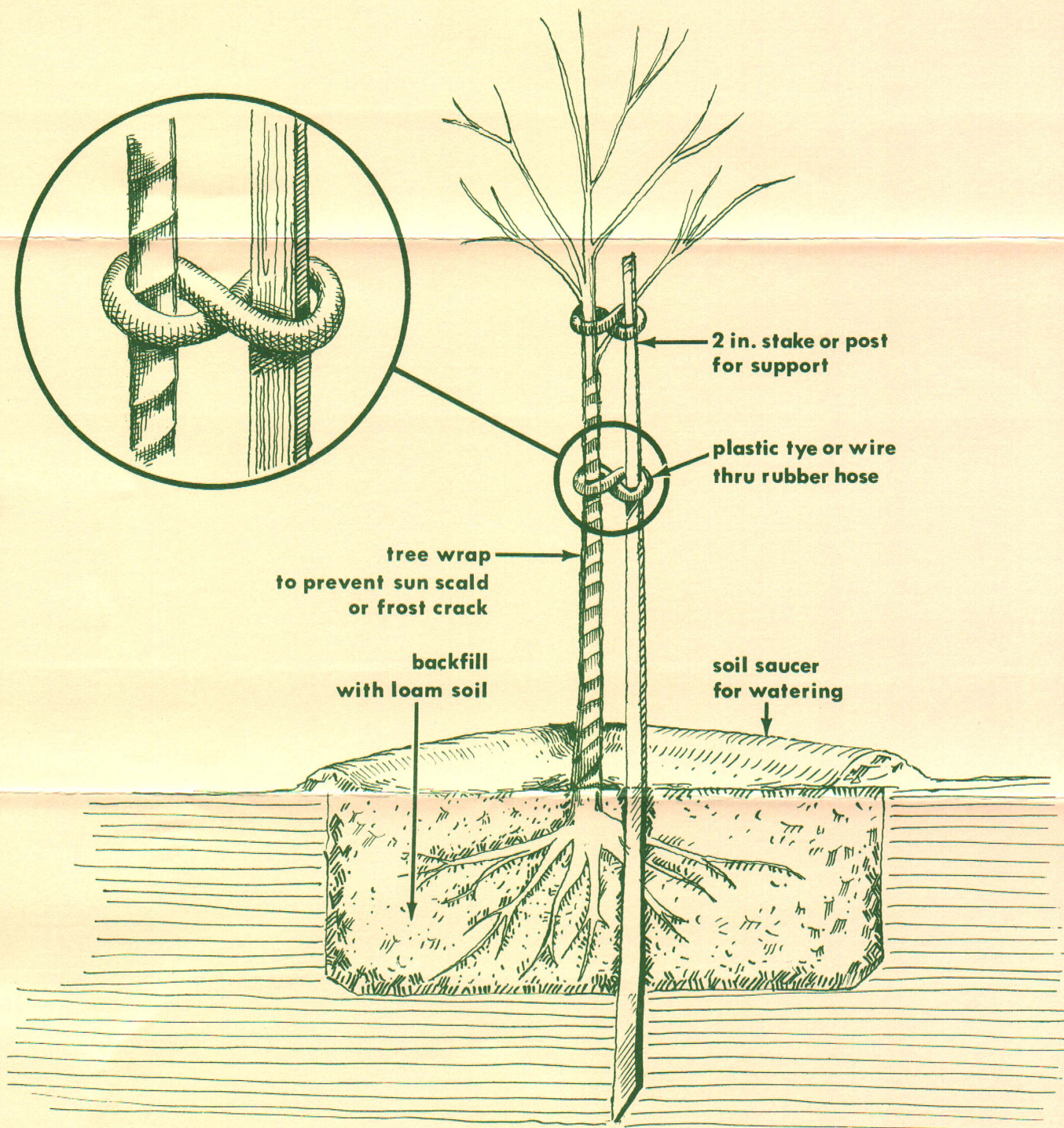
(b) If the site does not have a sandy subsoil, the hole should be drained with a tile line connected to a free-flowing drain.

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Use anchored guy wires to support larger trees with roots in soil ball.



Smaller, bare-root trees can be supported by stake or post.

3. Place the plant in the hole carefully and position for the best effect. Non-deteriorating pots such as tarpaper, plastic, etc., should be cut and removed. Lightweight, untreated burlap may be left in place; rot-proof burlap should be removed but avoid breaking the soilball. Only vigorous plants with well developed roots, free from abnormal circling, kinking, or twisting should be planted.

4. Backfill the hole with a loam soil, avoiding clay subsoils. If the soil is sandy, peat moss should be added (1 part peat to 3 parts of soil). Fertilizer should seldom be added at the time of planting. However, if a fertilizer is used it should be of the slowly soluble type (most organics or metal ammonium phosphates). Do not use a highly soluble fertilizer. Be sure to follow the instructions on the container, since rates of application vary with the various products. When the hole is about 2/3 filled, water thoroughly to settle the soil. Complete the backfilling to ground level and, if desired, form a shallow soil saucer around the perimeter of the hole, to serve as a water reservoir.

5. The plant should be watered thoroughly every 10 to 14 days, provided it hasn't rained heavily in the interim period. Do not overwater, as this can cause as much trouble as not enough water.

6. If it is necessary to support a tree, follow these procedures:

(a) For small diameter trees — place a sturdy stake in the ground close to the trunk and tie

with a plastic 'Binder Tye' or a piece of old rubber hose.

(b) For medium sized trees — support with three guy wires placed evenly around the tree and forming an angle of 45° to 60° at the ground. The wires may be connected to the trunk by lag screws (strong eye hooks) appropriately positioned, or by passing the wire through a small portion of a rubber hose positioned around the stem. The lower end of the wire should be anchored by a stake or a piece of concrete buried in the soil.

(c) Trees with large sized balls may be able to support themselves or they may be guyed if desired.

7. Some pruning may be needed to remove broken branches, branches that are growing into the center, or to reduce the total leaf area to counter-balance the loss of roots. When pruning, enhance the natural beauty of the plant and never leave stubs.

8. Thin-barked trees should have their trunks wrapped with a paper tree-wrap or a fine-mesh wire screen to prevent sunscald and frost crack.

9. Plantings on sandy soils may benefit by applying one or two inches of woodchips, ground corncobs, or shredded manure on the soil surface, as a mulch, to reduce loss of moisture by evaporation and the growth of weeds.