

Digging, Planting and Care of Flowering Crabapples

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Extending the season

There are several steps to take. First, use better judgment concerning tree selection for transplanting, site conditions (avoid hot, windy sites), weather conditions (don't plant when it's in the 90s and bone dry).

Secondly, avoid digging crabapples when they are just coming into leaf from May through late June.

Thirdly, consider the digging method. There are three fairly successful ways for summer planting. (Hand, trencher or spade digging used with any of these three will yield equally good results.)

Spring pre-digging: Dig before leaves emerge, then store trees above ground in a mulch. This is the surest way to guarantee survival. Plants will even put out a heavy crop of hair roots and scarcely slow in growth. The only drawbacks are cost and the necessity of long-range planning.

Stage digging: The sides of the ball are dug and burlapped, but the bottom roots are left intact for three or four days before digging is completed. Ideally, the tree is then placed in a lath house and the tops kept misted and the root ball thoroughly watered. One significant advantage is the chance to saturate the ball while the tree's still in the hole. This method takes time, but it isn't particularly costly and is quite successful.

Tree spade root pruning: The simplest and most economical method. Plants are root pruned in the spring with a tree spade, then final dug with the same tree spade in the summer. The result is a tree whose growth has been retarded and hardened off sufficiently to allow safe summer transplanting.

Planting

More plants are lost from inadequate and improper watering when the plants are installed and during the first week or so after planting. Ideally, the nurserymen should deliver a plant that has a moist ball of earth. But it is the responsibility of the contractor to see that the ball is saturated when the plant is installed. We have found only one way to really tell if a plant has too much, too little, or just enough moisture. Use a probe.

Soil Amendments

While some of the current research indicates that amendments are unnecessary, we still use them.

Mulch

Always mulch with at least three inches of organic material; shredded bark, wood chips, leaf mold, or native peat are all good.

Pruning

Newly installed plants need exactly the same kind of pruning that mature crabapples need, i.e., removal of dead wood, crosses, rubs, water shoots, suckers and any branch that does not compliment the tree. It is not necessary to head back a newly transplanted crabapple. For some reason, severe heading back does not appear to be beneficial.

Timing is not particularly significant. We try to stay away from pruning when the plant is in full bloom, and again when the fruit is weighing down the branches. We just don't care to harm the bloom display and, in the case of heavy fruiting, it is easier to tell exactly what to remove if the limbs are not bending with a heavy crop of fruit. **Credit: OGA Notes, 4/85**

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