

# JOB TALK

## Instant landscapes? Move trees

■ Ever hear of "instant landscaping?" It's a landscape design meant to look very well established, even if it's just 10 minutes old.

Dennis Higbie, landscape manager at the Walt Disney MGM Studios in Orlando, Fla., has a baker's dozen of instant landscaping rules, from plant acquisition to big-tree moving, to maintenance. And, he says, each procedure is based on the mandate that you shouldn't be able to tell the plant or tree was moved into the space.

"Acquisition of healthy, pest-free plant material can make or break a project, financially and aesthetically," says Higbie. "Plant acquisition sets the 'instant landscaper' apart from his or her counterpart in other disciplines. If what we need is not available *right now*, putting on a third shift won't solve the problem."

Higbie's approach to plant spacing involves intentionally over-planting certain portions of projects to hasten the desired look and provide specimens for future use.

"Once you have an instant landscape," says Higbie, "follow-up care is the most critical aspect." Crews keep daily tabs of plant vitality. Transplanted trees are immediately guyed, fertilized, watered three times at installation, and as needed thereafter.

The landscape division of Disney World is expert when it comes to moving big trees. The time required to prepare and move a tree can be anywhere from three days to three years, and what happens during the move is crucial to the tree's lifespan.

### Elements of timing

- Deciduous trees should be dormant or in period of least



**Balling and burlapping:** balling hooks tighten hog wire around soil ball. Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Co.

active growth. Spring is recommended for evergreens, when soil is warm.

- However, timing is often based on installation schedules, tree availability, operational demands.

- Trees received bare root may be boxed or held until a later date.

- "Know" the tree, understand growth principles, and observe to let you know when a specimen may be moved without harm.

Which tree moving method to choose? Size, type, present location and future location are the elements to consider. Disney uses these:

#### 1) Balling and burlapping method

- a. The size of the root ball is determined and marked.

- b. A trench is dug, and the ball formed, using a balling spade, a sharp, flat tool.

- c. Large roots are cut with a pruner or saw.

- d. The ball is tapered inwards towards the bottom, wrapped with burlap. Nails hold burlap in place.

- e. The wrapped ball is secured with poultry wire.

- f. If the tree is not going to be moved immediately, the hole should be filled with sawdust.

#### 2) Cut root ball method

- a. A trench is dug around the tree.

- b. Tree is moved without wrapping the soil ball. The tight, fibrous root system of trees, palms and bamboos moved this way helps keep the ball together.

- c. Used on specimen oaks. The oaks were root pruned in advance to encourage formation of a very dense, fibrous root system. The result was a shallow, broad root ball in excess of 14 ft. in diameter and two feet deep.

#### Lifting techniques

**Choke strapping:** Used on single-trunk palms. Not recommended for trees, as it puts tremendous pressure on the bark.

Choke strapping involves the use of a nylon strap wrapped around the trunk. Protective wrap helps prevent scarring. Even with protection, choke strapping can result in serious girdling damage if used on trees.

**Barrel strapping:** With this method, the tree is lifted by the root ball, and therefore does not stretch the trunk. The strength of the solid root ball supports the tree. Two wide straps are placed on either side of the root ball. They are looped through each other and then connected to leaders threaded to the top of the tree.

**Saddle strapping:** Like barrel strapping, saddle strapping involves lifting the tree by the root ball. The tree is lifted at an angle. Trees which must be loaded horizontally on a trailer are best lifted using saddle strapping technique.

—Terry McIver

**TABLE 1. Elements of 'instant landscaping'**

- |                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ● organization and planning | ● design considerations |
| ● installation practices    | ● unique specimens      |
| ● plant acquisition         | ● big-tree moving       |
| ● maintenance               | ● flower beds           |
| ● plant size                | ● spacing               |
| ● turf                      |                         |

**TABLE 2. Adaptability of central Florida trees to transplanting**

#### Trees which establish well after a transplant:

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| ● elms        | ● magnolias |
| ● maples      | ● oaks      |
| ● queen palms | ● willows   |

#### Trees which require special care:

- |                            |               |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| ● acacias                  | ● camphors    |
| ● canary island date palms | ● eucalyptus  |
| ● pine                     | ● photocarcus |