

Garden Council's six steps for tree growth

Horticulturists have been recommending a slightly varied method of planting trees for the last several years. But unfortunately, old traditions and old "professional recommendations" die slowly. The Canadian Garden Council says that often the old fashioned planting techniques hinder a home gardener's lovingly planted tree's ability to live a long life. Traditionally, gardeners dig a deep hole, surround the tree's root ball, or bare roots, with fresh new bagged soil or cattle manure, peat moss etc., and then tightly pack it all down.

Initially there usually is good root growth as the young roots grow into the new soil and additives. But, once the roots reach the hard-packed original soil, this outward growth stops. Instead of spreading into the surrounding garden, the tree roots encircle the planting pit like the roots of a potted plant in a clay or plastic pot. This then stifles growth of the tree.

An additional problem with this older method is what may be termed the bath tub effect. By digging a large hole in heavy clay soil, and filling that hole with loose topsoil and additives such as peat moss, it can often become a type of French drain; i.e. the place to which the excess surface water drains during spring runoff or heavy rain storms in the summer. If this happens, the tree could literally be sitting in a filled bath tub of water which will cause its demise in just a year or two. Most trees, with the exception of willows, poplars and, to a degree, arborvitae (cedars), cannot tolerate their roots sitting in water for days at a time. The roots need air just as much as they need water.

The Canadian Garden Council recommends a six-step strategy for ensuring stronger, healthier and longer-lived trees - planted not only by homeowners, but also by professional landscapers, parks departments and other institutional green space managers.

1) Choose only the best quality trees, purchased from a reliable supplier who will still be there if you have any problems.

2) Plant trees on your property where they will have sufficient room for both their roots and branches to grow without interference with the house, other structures or services such as overhead wires or sewer pipes.

3) For each tree, prepare a shallow planting area, just about 30 cm (12 in.) deep, and five times the diameter of the soil ball (or spread of the bare roots) by spading the entire area, and adding small amounts of Canadian sphagnum peat moss, cattle manure or other soil amendment (including home compost). This preparation is not a hole, but rather like preparing a garden bed for planting or annual flowers or vegetable transplants.

4) Now dig a hole in the middle of this prepared area and set the soil ball or spread out the bare roots in the hole. It is most important that the top of the soil ball be exactly even with, or perhaps slightly above the level of the soil. For burlapped soil balls, once the tree is set, the tied burlap should be cut, so that it may be folded back down the sides of the ball. For trees in paper fibre pots, make at least three cuts halfway up the sides of the pot. There is no need to remove the pot, not even the bottom. The paper fibre will rot readily. For trees in plastic pots, these must be carefully removed (with soil as moist as possible so that it will hold together).

If bare root trees or shrubs are being planted, you will note an indication or slight difference in color on the stem or trunk of each plant, where the trunk emerged from the ground when growing in the nursery. This level should also be at the level of the ground, or slightly above, when your planting operation is complete. Obviously, all roots emerging from the main stem should be in the soil!

5) Lightly pack the soil in place

around the tree. Do not pack the soil down hard with your feet. Use water to remove the air pockets in the soil. If these air pockets are not removed, they may cause the roots to dry out (no moist soil in contact with them), and also ill definitely be the cause of the soil around the tree or shrub sinking.

6) If the tree is unable to withstand anticipated winds, then provide a strong stake, out at least 20 cm (8 in.) from the trunk, and

attach the tree to the stake with flexible plastic, rubber inner tube, or cloth ties that will not cause damage to the trunk or stem as it grows in diameter. Remove the stake and ties 6 to 9 months after planting. A mulch of pine or cedar bark applied to the original prepared area will also help preserve soil moisture content, but it should not touch the tree trunk.

This method of planting provides your tree, or trees and

shrubs, with an enlarged area for the roots to grow before encountering the original hard-packed soil. Most important, the tree's roots do not get accustomed to an ideal planting soil in a confined area, and then encounter the much more difficult-to-penetrate original clay soil.

Home gardeners, before they plant their trees, should first consider the ways trees can improve the micro-climate around their house. Planting trees on the

southeast or southwest side of the home will reduce air conditioning costs and, planting windbreaks or rows of evergreens on the north to block winter winds, will lower heating costs.

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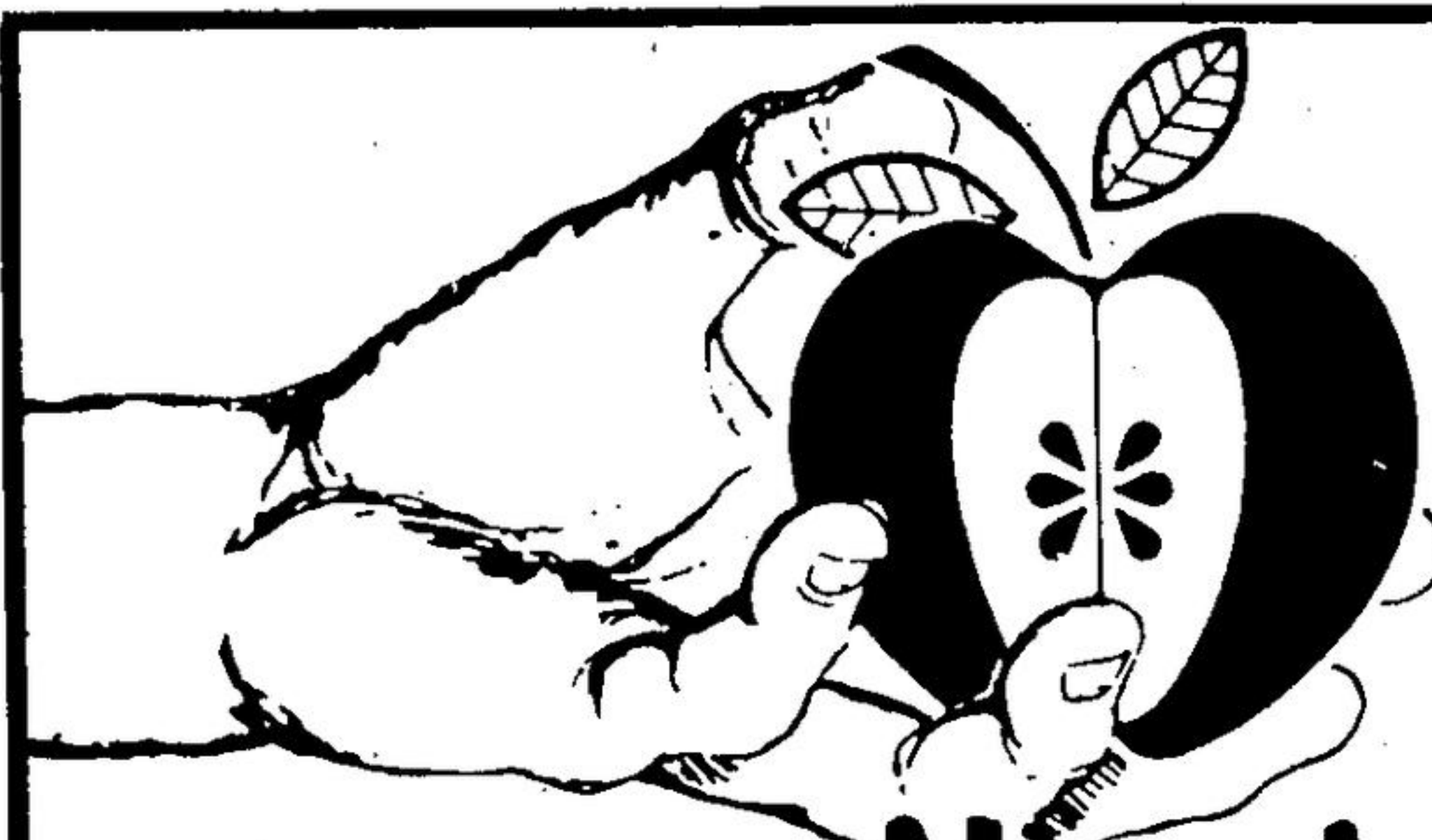
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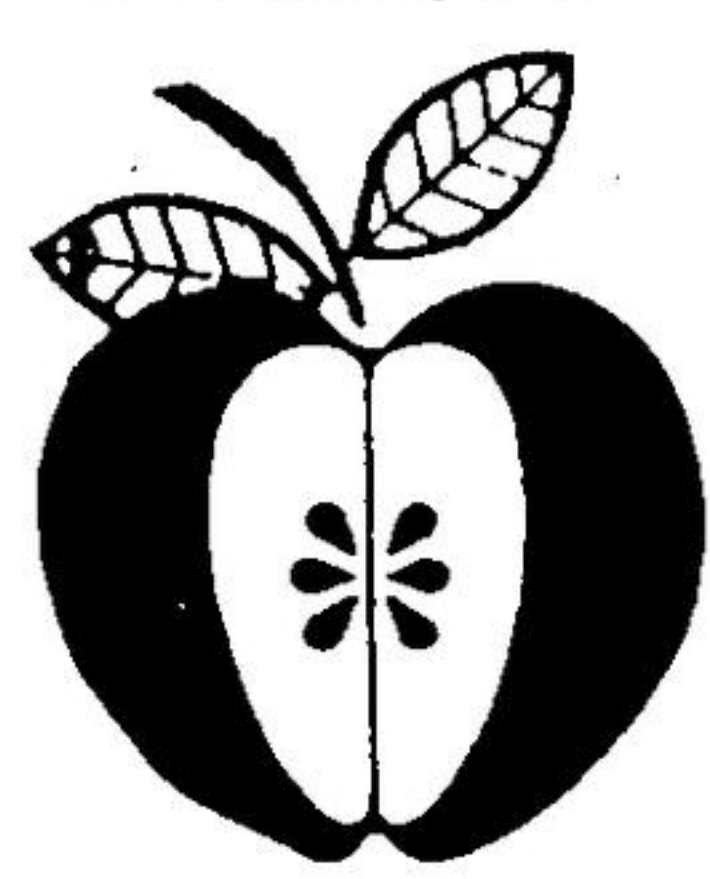


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