

## Plant a tree in honor of Arbor Day

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Given that yesterday was Arbor Day, why not plant a tree this weekend?

Garden centers are stock-full of great selections for your landscape and have lots of people on hand to help you pick out the perfect tree.

If you decide to plant a tree, make sure you plant it properly for longevity. One of the biggest mistakes that I see is that people plant trees too deep, burying the root flare.

The root flare is the part of the tree where the roots transition into trunk. The root flare should be at or slightly above ground level.

Most of the time I see the root flare too deep; only occasionally do I see it too high above ground.

When the root flare is buried under soil, the tree tends to struggle. The primary roots are thriving so the tree sends out a secondary root system as a survival mechanism.

This secondary root system has a tendency to grow in a circular pattern, surrounding the trunk. Eventually as the root and trunk grows in girth, the root ends up girdling the trunk of the tree.

Girdling many times results in a bulge of collected sugars above the girdled area. The root is preventing sugars from getting to the roots and then a vicious cycle begins.

Roots aren't getting the necessary food source to thrive and consequently the roots can't take in water and nutrients for the top to thrive.

Girdling doesn't always result in death, however. There are a lot of variables that come into play.

These variables include the species of the tree, the overall health of the tree, the planting location and environment as well as others.

Some trees will live a long time after being planted too deep - they just won't thrive.

Some trees won't live long in this type of situation.

Volcano mulching produces similar results to girdling. Volcano mulching is when you pile up much more mulch than is necessary around the trunk of the tree - sort of resembling a volcano.

The roots tend to do the same thing in volcano mulch; they begin to circle the tree.

Before planting, find the root flare even if it means you have to tease away some of the soil. Make sure that the hole is just as deep as the root system and twice as wide or wider.

Remember that tree roots grow out with the majority of them in the top 15" of soil.

Happy belated Arbor Day and go out and plant a tree!



Japanese zelkova (left) and variegate beech (right) are excellent ornamental trees



Perfect root flare