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Planting Bare Root Stock Trees

By Bo Kelley, MBG Arborist

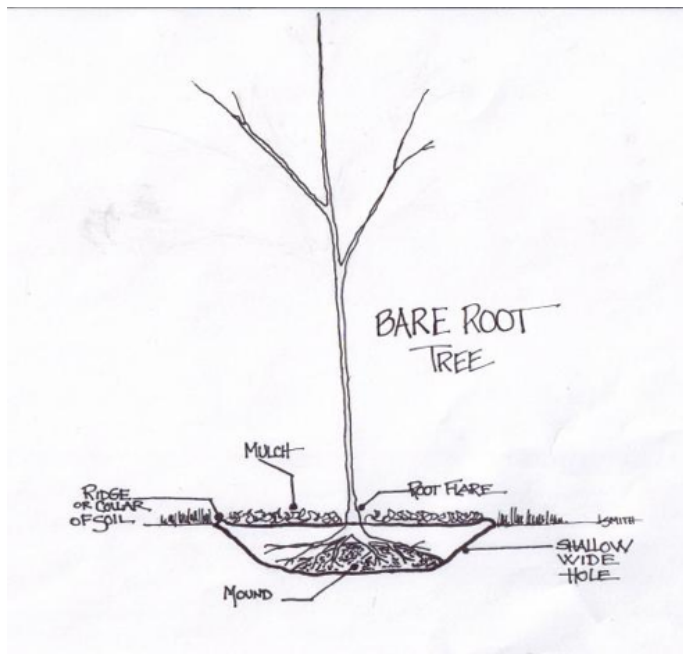
With Arbor Day approaching, the availability of trees from nurseries and garden centers will be increasing to meet the demands of enthusiasts eager to plant their own forests. Many of these trees may come in bare root stock, meaning that they do not have a soil substrate held together within a container or with burlap. The Arbor Day Foundation sends trees around the world (20 million last year alone!) and they are predominately shipped as bare root stock. There are pros and cons to planting bare root trees, but if you follow a few simple guidelines, your trees will be off to a great start in life.



Bare root trees will often be wrapped in a protective covering to increase humidity and prevent dehydration around the roots. Since the roots are exposed, they are more prone to desiccation than the roots of a tree that is in a container. To ensure that the trees are not dehydrated prior to planting, soak the roots in water for 2-6 hours, depending on the size of the tree and the water requirements of the species. During this time, you can prep your planting site.

Remember: "right tree, right place." Consider the tree's height at maturity to the drainage needs of the species prior to planting. A tree that needs well-drained soil should not be planted in an area of your yard that holds water, and a tree that grows taller than 15 feet should not be planted under or around power lines. Once a suitable site is picked, remove grass or any other vegetation in at least a 3-foot circle, exposing the soil underneath.

The hole for the tree should be deep enough to bury the main structural roots near the surface, but not so deep that they are



planted going straight down into the ground. At the correct depth, the root flare should be just above the level of the surrounding soil. Be sure to untangle and spread out the roots evenly, creating a "base" that the tree can sit on. Begin to replace the backfill soil and gently tamp it into place. If too much air is left in the soil, the delicate roots could desiccate. However, the tree roots require small pores within the soil to aid in water and air uptake, so be careful not to compress the soil too much. The idea is to establish the tree firmly without cementing it into place in heavily compacted soil.

Once in place, you will want to water the tree in. Generously water the tree slowly until the soil is saturated. Let the water drain for a few minutes and then water again until saturated. The tree will begin to establish itself in the soil by putting out new root growth. However, the lack of the weight of a root ball found on container grown trees means that bare root trees are more prone to toppling. Staking your young trees may be required if your trees are in areas that are exposed to direct wind, or in areas that experience excess water run-off. If you stake your tree, be sure to remove the support after the first year. Too often, stakes and bracing straps are left in place for too long and the tree grows around the straps, potentially girdling the tree. Additionally, trees that are staked for too long are unable to develop reaction wood and a substantial trunk taper, making them weaker in the long run. Staking is not a requirement; it should only be used to keep trees upright while their root systems establish.

Bare root trees offer excellent advantages. Since they have retained most of their original root system, they grow much more efficiently than containerized trees, whose roots are often cut or lost in the transplanting process. Additionally, bare root trees establish directly in native soil, and they do not have to transition from soil/potting mix to native soil as a container tree does. They are much easier to handle and cost significantly less than containerized trees, as well. If you follow the guidelines and take some care in the preparation stage, your bare root tree will establish quickly and provide you with years of successful growth.

"Arbor Day is not like other holidays. Each of those reposes on the past, while Arbor Day proposes for the future."

- J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor Day

***Cornus florida* - Flowering Dogwood (Cornaceae)**

By Linnea West, MBG Tree Team; photo by Jan Castillo, MBG Tree Team

Native to eastern North America and northern Mexico, *Cornus florida* grows wild along woodland edges, as a forest understory tree, and on rocky ledges. It thrives in partial to full sunlight and moist, acid, well-drained soil.



Flowering Dogwood typically grows to 15' in ten years, with a potential of reaching 30' or more. Mature bark develops a checkered pattern of miniature "alligator hide."

Wide-spreading graceful branches have twigs that turn upward resembling candelabra. At the tips of twigs rest chocolate-drop flower buds. In April, these buds open creating a breath-taking display of white blossoms. Dogwoods have hermaphroditic 'perfect' flowers with male and female together in the inflorescence. Approximately 20 tiny yellow flowers make up the center, surrounded by 4 large petal-like bracts (modified leaves) at the base of the flowerhead.

The opposite, elliptical leaves have 5-7 arcuate veins curving to follow the leaf edge. In autumn, the

leaves turn maroon to scarlet.

Dogwood fruit is a cluster of 2-10 red drupes, ripening late summer into fall. These fruits are relished by many songbirds including bluebird, cardinal, junco, tufted titmouse, robin, tree swallow, bobwhite, woodpecker, as well as squirrels and chipmunks, wild turkey, raccoon, skunk and beaver.

Cornus florida is a nectar plant for butterflies and bees and larval host for the Spring Azure butterfly.

900 in sec. L on the MBG arboretum map

Cercis canadensis – Eastern Redbud (Fabaceae)

By Linnea West, MBG Tree Team; photo by Jan Castillo, MBG Tree Team

In the wild, Eastern Redbud grows along woodland edges, thickets, bluffs, and rocky streams. Its range is eastern North America from CT south to FL and west to TX. Reaching a height of 20-30' with a spread of 25-35', Redbud grows as a single short-trunked tree or may develop several trunks. Redbud thrives in full sun or part shade in moist, fertile, well-drained soil.



Before leaf-out in early spring, fragrant pink, pea-style flowers cover twigs and branches. These tiny flowers can even sprout on craggy old bark. The fruit is a 3" peapod often persisting through winter. The leaves of *Cercis* are heart-shaped, blue-green, smooth, and alternately arranged. They turn yellow in fall.

Redbud attracts native bees, bumble bees, and butterflies with its abundant sweet flowers as well as serving as host plant for the larvae of Henry's Elfin butterfly. Many songbirds build nests in the wide-spreading branches, and feast on caterpillars found on its leaves. In the summer, if you look closely, you might spot charming perfect circles in a few leaf edges where the gentle pollinator Leafcutter Bee has removed a tiny door to seal up her solitary home.

The botanical genus name of *Cercis* comes from the Greek, *kerkis*, a weaver's shuttle, describing the seedpod.

124 in sec. L on the MBG Arboretum map.

As an added bonus, both of the trees above are suitable for planting under utility lines.

Tennessee Arbor Day is March 6th

The official City of Memphis celebration is at noon, hosted by Overton Park at the East Parkway Pavillion-389 East Parkway North. Memphis is a Tree City USA, so the Arbor Day Foundation is providing Eastern Redbud, Flowering Dogwood, and Buttonbush seedlings. TN Arbor Day is sponsored by The Memphis Tree Board, the City of Memphis Division of Parks and Neighborhoods, Memphis City Beautiful, and Memphis Botanic Garden.

MBG Arbor Day Celebration and Tree Tour 10:00 AM to Noon. Co-hosted by Memphis Tree Board and TUFC West TN Chapter. Join Arborist Bo Kelley and Tree Team member Linnea West on a tour from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm through the garden where they will discuss the role and value of trees in both natural and urban environments. Techniques for accurately identifying species in the field will be examined and tips for proper planting and care of your trees will be offered. A journal or notebook and weather-appropriate clothing are recommended. The Memphis Tree Board will be providing tree saplings to give away, Tree Benefits Coloring Books, and educational information all day. Free and open to the public.

Germantown's Arbor Day celebration will start at 9:00 at Germantown Crossing Shopping Center (Germantown Rd. & Farmington Blvd.) Dogwood samplings will be given away with proof of Germantown residency. From Noon to 2 p.m. at Bobby Lanier Farm Park, 2660 Cross Country Drive, fruit trees will be available for purchase. See parks & Recreation Facebook page for descriptions of fruit tree species to be sold. The event is sponsored by the Germantown Tree Board, Beautification Commission, and Parks and Recreation Commission.

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