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Transplanting Guidelines

Sometimes the cute little evergreen that got planted beside the sidewalk doesn't stay so little. Either the sidewalk gets detoured or the plant moves. Before trying to tackle the task you need to view your options.

Transplanting

Sometimes it becomes necessary to move a plant in the landscape. Transplanting is a difficult process, and under many conditions it puts the plant under high risk of death or damage.

Is It Worthwhile?

This is a good question to start with. First, if you attempt to move a plant during the wrong season the likelihood of its survival is low. Second, moving an existing plant might cost more than simply replacing the plant. Third, some plants are harder to move than others. After weighing these factors, and possibly getting a professional opinion, you should have a pretty good idea whether or not transplanting is a good move.

Taking plants from the wild is normally not a good idea. In many cases they are legally protected, and even if they are not protected they will have a hard time surviving after being relocated.

Materials

The materials needed will depend on the size of your plant. A small plant will only require a shovel and piece of burlap. Larger plants will require heavy string and a means of transporting the plant. If plants are going to be dug outside of the optimal season the use of an anti-shock treatment is beneficial.

The Process

Doing some pre-transplant pruning is very helpful, yet this requires advance notice. Six months to a year before the scheduled transplant, cut (or prune) the roots of the plant in the shape of the desired rootball. This will encourage the development of fibrous roots close to the plant, and lessen the shock of the subtending transplant. Removing a portion of the plant's canopy at the same time will ease the stress placed on the plant.

At the time of transplanting, tie up the canopy of the plant to protect it from damage. Dig a trench around the plant, leaving eighteen inches of rootball diameter for every inch of trunk caliper. Dig down approximately twenty-four inches before cutting underneath the plant. The rootball should be wrapped in burlap to protect it from breaking apart. Large plants should also have heavy string reinforcing the burlap and holding the trunk to prevent shifting.

Notes

- A twenty-four inch rootball will weigh close to two hundred pounds.
- As a general rule, plants should be transplanted in their dormant season.
- After undergoing transplanting a plant will need to be carefully watered.
- Plants with taproots are nearly impossible to transplant.

Sources

This sheet has been compiled from experience, information from Rodale's Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening, and information from the Pennsylvania Certified Horticulturist Reference Guide