

Tree Planting to Break Cabin Fever

Staying home for weeks on end can lead to boredom during the global pandemic, but as we make our way into Spring, it's important to make sure you're getting fresh air. Fresh air, and the smell of plants and flowers, can lift stress and anxiety, and getting outside in a responsible way can help break that cabin fever. If you've got extra time on your hands and family stuck inside, this is the best time of year to start planting trees! Making sure your trees are planted in the best way will increase their chances of success, and give you the joy of watching something you and your family has planted and grown.

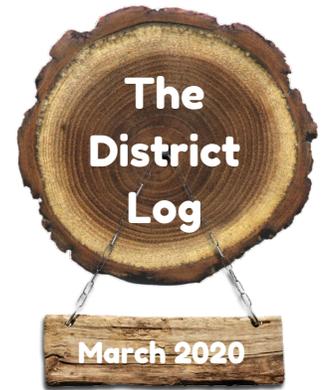
Planting a tree seems like a simple thing, but proper planting techniques allow your trees not only to survive, but thrive. The most common trees people get are bare-root seedlings, and containerized trees, such as in burlap sacks or pots. Bare-root seedlings are by far the cheapest to get, and require the least amount of effort to plant in large amounts. They are also a bit more fragile, so extra care should be taken. These trees need to be planted very close to the root-collar, the area where the stem changes into the roots. Too deep, and the stem can rot and die; too shallow, and the roots dry out and kill the tree. Also, it may seem obvious, but you have to make sure the roots are pointing downward. Curved or exposed roots are very bad for the seedlings health, and can lead to problems in its growth. The recommended way to plant these trees is to take a shovel and make a slit in the ground, place the roots straight down gently, and then make another slit to gently push the soil around the roots. There are also tree planters that can be attached behind a tractor, that essentially only need the operator to feed trees into the planting spade. This works best for large areas.

Trees in burlap bags or containers are usually much larger and have bigger root systems. This makes them much hardier, but takes a bit more effort to get them planted. The first step is to remove whatever container they are in, and inspect the roots for any damage. Sometime the roots will be tightly bound together, in this case you should take a knife you don't care too much about and lightly slash across the root ball until they are loose. This causes some damage to the roots, but is necessary so the tree doesn't strangle itself. The hole for the tree should be just deep enough to enclose the root ball, and make sure to use this soil to refill the hole! Using different soil can make it so water will not flow correctly around the tree, and most often leads to "drowning" the roots. A layer of mulch around the base of the tree, reaching out to the ends of the branches, can help the tree out greatly. The mulch will act as a "drip-feeder" for water during drier parts of the year, and acts as a buffer for temperature that can otherwise harm growing roots. In the case of both bare-root seedlings and containerized trees, ample water is very important for the newly growing roots. Water the soil when the tree is planted until it is moist, but not saturated, like good gardening soil.

You may be thinking that this all doesn't seem like a safe idea during this period of social distancing, but it can actually help you maintain proper distance from each other. When planting for natural screens or in your yards, planting at least 12 feet apart is ideal, so if your family and friends are over to help you can keep them at more than a safe distance. If you have multiple rows, you can still keep the 6 foot distance by staggering rows. The density is up to you, but it is recommended to be no closer than 12 feet together. If you have only a few trees, it is less about how close you plant, and more about choosing the best spot to plant. The most important thing to consider is where the roots will have the most success, and avoid problems in the future. The root systems can be as wide or even wider than the canopy of the fully grown tree, so avoid planting near foundations, septic systems, or anywhere else you would not want tree roots. The green part of the tree is important to consider as well, all trees want plenty of light, so avoid planting them underneath well-established trees or in totally shaded areas. These rules are more like guidelines when planting in the woods, sometimes it is not wise or even possible to create 12 by 12 grids, and it really doesn't look natural out in the relatively chaotic forest. Plant in clumps, while maintaining social distance, where trees can easily get light and water for best results.

This is a good guide for planting trees in general, but each species of tree has different needs. The easiest ones to take care of are those native to your area, since they have adapted to do best in the conditions in their native range. Many ornamental species are non-native, and while they can be pretty, there are just as many beautiful native tree species. Another thing to consider is that planting trees in or nearby woods is not necessary. Trees have been growing for much longer than humans have been around, and they've figured out how to grow themselves pretty well. Planting trees in the woods is helpful when trying to improve forest diversity, or to reforest areas after a harvest. Oftentimes, regrowing new trees in the woods needs the help of a professional forester to get back on track. Finally, the soil can determine the success of many tree species on your property. Different soil types are best for different species of trees, depending on the conditions that tree species is used to tolerating.

If you are looking for ideas on what to plant, or want to purchase native trees for planting on your property, the Barry Conservation District can help you out. We have a friendly forester on staff who can help figure out what options are best for you and your woods. Not only that, but we will be having our annual tree sale this Spring, where we have a wide selection of native tree species. Not sure where to start? Call District Forester Ben Savoie at 269-908-4134, or send him an email at ben.savoie@macd.org.



This month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 5
Site Visit Acreage - 600
Referrals - 13
Media Occurrences - 3
QFP Verifications - 1
QFP Acreage - 170

Trainings:
Forest Pest Workshop w/
Eyes on the Forest

Open Referrals:

None at this time.

During this difficult time, I highly recommend following the CDC guidelines for social distancing and staying home if you can. Please stay healthy and safe!

