

Seedling Planting Tips

When to Plant Bareroot Seedlings

1. Planting season for bareroot seedlings is December through February.
2. For best results, bareroot seedlings should be planted as early in the planting season as possible (December-January) as long as soil moisture is good.

Early planting allows time for new root growth during the dormant season and enables seedlings to compete more successfully for water and nutrients during the upcoming spring.

If at all possible, complete planting by March 1 to avoid the traditional dry weather of late winter and early spring. Survival rates of seedlings planted after March 1 are significantly lower unless they receive an ideal amount of rainfall.

Proper Planting Techniques

1. Pine seedlings will require a hand-planting tool or machine planter that will create a planting slit at least 8 inches deep (10 inches is preferred) and 3 inches wide to accommodate pine seedling roots and allow proper root alignment.
2. Baldcypress seedlings have more massive root systems than pine seedlings and therefore require larger planting holes for proper planting. Baldcypress planting tools and machine planters should be capable of making a slit 12-15 inches deep and 4 inches wide to accommodate proper root alignment.
3. When planting, the most important steps are to create a good planting hole and properly align and pack the seedling.
4. After a proper planting slit is made, insert the seedling until the tap root reaches the bottom of the planting slit and raise the seedling to the proper planting depth. For baldcypress, loblolly, slash, and sand pine seedlings, the root collar should be 1-2 inches below ground line.

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5. On droughty soils such as deep sands and dry ridges, seedlings may benefit from deeper planting as long as the terminal bud is at least 3 inches above ground line.
6. For longleaf pine, proper planting depth is critical. Longleaf seedlings should be planted so that when the soil settles after planting, the root collar is at or slightly below ground line.
7. After the seedling is raised to the proper planting depth and it is in a vertical position without leaning, close the planting slit and pack the soil around the hole. Proper packing can be determined by grasping the stem of the seedling; if the seedling moves up and down when the stem is pulled, the seedling is improperly packed. If the seedling remains still when pulled, the packing is suitable.

Additional Steps to Ensure Quality and Successful Planting

The risk of planting failure can be significantly reduced by following these guidelines.

1. Plan ahead -- don't wait until the last minute to perform site preparation, acquire seedlings, and hire a tree planting vendor. (You may benefit by hiring someone to handle all the work from start to finish.)
2. Ask others in your area who have hired tree planting vendors in the past and use a vendor with a good reputation who can transport and store seedlings correctly.
3. Sign a contract with the vendor that clearly states the following:
 - Planting equipment must be capable of creating proper planting slits.
 - Seedlings planted must be properly transported, stored and handled at all times.
 - Planting must be performed during suitable weather conditions.
 - Date by which planting must be completed.
 - Number of correctly planted seedlings per acre required to receive payment.
4. Visit the site during the planting operation and inspect the work.

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