

# THE OUTSIDER

Thoughts from Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Emily Swihart



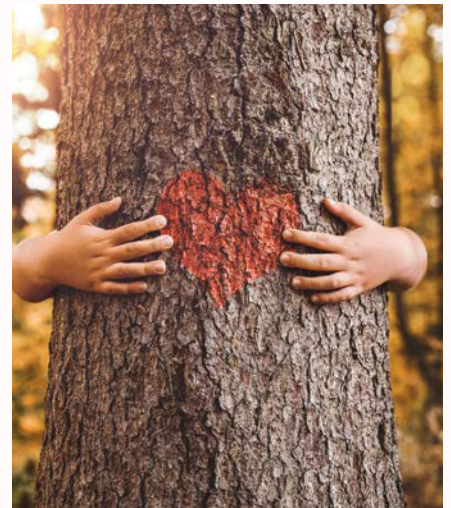
## AUTUMN IS HERE: TIME TO PLANT A TREE

For many of us, we associate spring as the optimal time of year to plant trees and why wouldn't we: spring is when we celebrate Arbor Day, when we get our gardens growing and when perennials break dormancy as if to celebrate with us the passing of another winter. However, autumn is a fantastic time to incorporate new trees into your landscape.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A TREE IS PLANTED?

When we adopt a tree from a nursery and add it to our home landscape, the tree experiences a major change. In the nursery setting, the tree is well cared for: protected from the hazards of nature, given consistent and adequate water, and grown in a soil medium that is dense with nutrients and well drained. It is an ideal place for a young tree to grow.

When we plant those same trees in our landscape, the living conditions change, and the tree will need to adapt. This recovery effort and long-term success of the tree depends heavily on the root systems' ability to expand into the surrounding native soil and provide resources to the tree. By planting trees in the autumn, we are giving the tree an additional growing season to recover from transplant shock and put on root growth that will be advantageous to surviving the successive summer heat and drought.





## WHEN TO PLANT?

Our calendar expresses autumn as September 21 through December 21 but trees don't follow the same almanac as we do so we must adjust. As we look at an autumn planting in northern Illinois, we are generally considering autumn as late August through October. Some sources will advise planting until the ground freezes and that can be acceptable in some situations but planting earlier in the season can be particularly beneficial for root growth, especially evergreen trees who are particularly susceptible to winter die back.

"Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall."  
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

## CARING FOR NEWLY PLANTED TREES

Regardless of the season during which you plant a tree, spring or autumn, standards of care are recommended. Although approaching dormancy, it is important to make sure soil moisture is available for trees in the autumn. Water requirements will diminish as transpiration becomes limited in cooler weather, but adequate soil moisture helps protect root systems through the winter months. Provide supplemental water to tree roots as necessary until the ground is frozen.

Natural wood mulch is a must have for any newly planted trees as it helps retain soil moisture, minimizes the impact of temperature fluctuations, and add organic matter to the soil as the wood material decomposes. Add a three-to-four-inch layer of natural wood mulch around the base of the tree in the form of a donut... around the trunk but not piled up on the trunk.

## OUTSIDER ACTION

- Plant a tree in your yard.
- Join our Planting and Caring for Trees Webinar

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