

RECEIVING, PLANT CARE AND MERCHANDISING

Unloading and Handling of Trees and Shrubs

1. Be careful pulling the individual trees and shrubs from the trailer. NEVER grasp or move the tree or shrub by holding onto the plant. The best method is to off-load the plants (by grabbing the pot) and move them directly onto pallets and move the pallets by forklift or pallet jack to the display location.
2. Wear safety glasses when moving the trees as branches can potentially cause eye injury if care is not exercised.
3. Trees, shrubs and roses may be shipped with the branches tied up, or within protective sleeves. The string or sleeves should be removed IMMEDIATELY upon arrival. Dispose of the shipping materials and inspect for plant damage at this time. Record any visible damage on the bill of lading.
4. Remember to display the container grown trees and shrubs on pallets. The plants look more appealing in size from a display perspective and pallets prevent root damage from hot blacktop asphalt

Cold Weather Care for Trees and Shrubs

During the opening weeks of the season, we will ship a selection of cold tolerant plants. They will arrive in a dormant state and will acclimate to local weather conditions within a short period of time. If a cold spell or freezing temperatures are anticipated, there are several options to prevent cold damage to the plants. While trees and shrubs are dormant they are not vulnerable to freezing.

1. Put as many plants as possible inside the hoop huts, grouping product as tightly as possible. Close the huts on both ends.
2. For shrubs that will remain outside, group them tightly together and cover them with burlap or tarps.
3. When covering the shrubs with tarps, make sure that they DO NOT touch the plants as they could suffer contact freezing. As each store display could be configured differently, store personnel must determine how to arrange the plants for maximum protection.
4. The greatest danger is from a late frost which could cause tip die-back on the trees and shrubs once the weather has warmed and the plants are no longer dormant and have put on new growth. A severe frost can actually kill vulnerable plants during this stage in the growing season, or temporarily return them to a dormant state.
5. If snow occurs, brush it off of the shrubs to avoid any large accumulation.
6. Common sense and staying tuned to local weather reports will allow you to anticipate any weather conditions that might affect the plant material.

Watering and General Care of Trees and Shrubs

1. Once you have positioned the plants, it is time to inspect the soil for moisture. Initially, trees and shrubs may arrive with frozen soil. As they thaw out, they will require watering to facilitate spring growth. Checking the soil is important as too little water will impede growth and too much water can drown the plant. As the season progresses, plants will arrive that may require water immediately after being moved into the display area. Once trees and shrubs begin to leaf out they will require periodic watering and should be checked regularly. The term "regularly" relies on weather conditions. Warm, dry windy conditions will require more frequent watering for smaller five and seven gallon container-grown plants. The larger containers have a tendency to retain moisture longer, but

weather conditions dictate when watering is required. Birch trees may actually require watering twice a day to support their rapid growth cycle.

2. Some plant containers may pass water rapidly through the lower drainage holes. This may be an indication the soil has dried and separated from the container and water is not soaking into the soil mixture. Tamp down the soil with your fingers along the soil surface to reseal the sides.
3. Water can be a distinct safety issue if it is left to collect on walking surfaces. From a plant hygiene concern, water should be applied to the soil surface and not on the plant itself. Try to water in the morning to allow time for the water to soak in to the soil and evaporate off of the plant. This will help prevent the spread of disease.
4. Occasionally you may see undesirable vegetation (weeds) beginning to grow within the container. This should be removed immediately as they will steal nutrients and water from the plant and will make the plant look unattractive.
5. Nutrients have been applied to the container grown plants that will be time-released over a six-month period. There is no need to apply more plant nutrients until it is positioned to be planted.
6. During handling a tree or shrub can become damaged. Severe damage to the main trunk or stem may prove fatal to the plant. Less serious injuries, such as a broken branch or discolored leaves can be pruned away by store personnel. Pruning of a broken branch should occur approximately one-half inch above the smaller branch or bud which is below the break.
7. Some trees may be planted inside a cloth bag which is placed into the container. The bag assists with keeping the soil mix in a ball which makes the process of planting easier. If you notice the plants root system has become dislodged above the soil, untie the bag and replant. The bag is biodegradable and will not stop root growth when planted and should remain in place. Advise the guest to untie the top of the bag and open the neck after they have placed it in the hole to allow stem growth.
8. Once trees leaf out, they are vulnerable to tip-over from strong winds. Care should be taken to ensure trees are positioned for display to prevent tip-over which could cause damage to the tree.

Disease and Insect Management for Trees and Shrubs

1. The best way to understand how to prevent plant disease in the garden center is to understand the disease triangle. There are three points- the host (plant), the disease and the environment surrounding it. An example is Powdery Mildew and how it manifests itself on rose plants. Powdery Mildew (disease) attacks roses (host) when they are crowded together, wet and with little air circulation (the environment). By providing more space for the roses to breath and the leaves to dry off, you are removing the environment. Another method mentioned earlier, is to water plants at the soil surface and avoid moisture on the plant itself. Pay attention to the watering cycle and the majority of issues will be prevented. It is important that personnel familiarize themselves with the various plants and recognize the typical characteristics of each specie. If a plant exhibits an unusual coloration or structural condition, it can be removed from the vicinity of other plants. The plant can then be observed for signs of stress (such as too much or too little water) or if in fact a disease has infected a plant. Conditions that affect more than one individual plant are usually attributable to disease that spread very quickly between those plants that were displayed too close together.
2. Insects are highly mobile and breed quickly wrecking havoc upon those plants which are not protected. The majority of trees and shrubs are shipped in a dormant stage, without leaves. There is little chance for those plants to carry any form of infestation and they are inspected and certified free of disease and injurious insects. This certification is reflected in the annual Plant Health Certificate (PHYTO) issued by the state of Wisconsin

Department of Agriculture, (be sure to keep this paper and put it on file). Plants which were shipped free of infestation must be re-examined once leaves are present to determine if insects have migrated to your display locations. Large adult insects are easy to detect and are an indicator that a larger issue may exist. The eggs of most insect varieties are quite small and difficult to locate. The eggs are also usually on the underside of leaves and on smaller shrubs and you must search carefully to detect them. The good news is, once you have determined a plant has been infested, it is easy to apply an insecticide to kill them. DO NOT apply chemical sprays in the presence of other people. Since the remedy is also available for sale as a cross-over retail item, it makes good sense for the Garden Center personnel to be very familiar with those plant treatments. Be prepared to demonstrate with a hand-held sprayer (cross-over sales item) and plain water on how to apply various chemicals.

3. Garden Center personnel should be prepared to field a wide variety of questions that could arise from guests regarding insects and plant disease. There are a number of excellent reference books available as retail cross-over sales and personnel should become familiar on which reference books are available to answer those questions.

Hot Weather Care for Trees and Shrubs

1. The greatest immediate danger to trees and shrubs during hot weather is easily solved. Check them for water daily.
2. The next great danger is placing your plants directly on hot blacktop and causing root damage.
3. Guests will also have questions for you about hot weather. They should follow the planting instructions on the back of the picture tag (which is attached to every tree and shrub) and water the newly planted tree or shrub as the soil dictates (dry-needs water). The biggest problem will come from the person who will need trees for a "windbreak". This typically translates to "I am going to plant these trees where there is no way I can water them daily". In truth, the typical request for windbreaks are for evergreen trees and many will probably die due to lack of convenient, available water. It is important when describing the effects of the various seasons on plants to remind the guest of the "soil dry-needs water" concept.
4. Shrubs also require water discipline during hot weather but are typically planted near an available water supply.

Merchandising Techniques for Trees and Shrubs

1. During receipt of plant material, predetermine location for pallets to be used for display for ease of handling. For display purposes, consider that direct sunlight is beneficial to most plant species, but could be harmful to certain varieties. Therefore, sunlight is a consideration and plays a major role in bringing trees and shrubs out of their dormant stage and makes them more attractive as a product.
2. COLOR SELLS. The number one criteria for selling trees and shrubs, is to get the focus of attention on them when they are most colorful which is a matter of timing. The best time to highlight ornamental trees would be during the spring, as they will be extremely colorful and in full bloom. That spring bloom may only last for a couple of weeks and once past the blooming stage, those trees will probably experience a slowdown in sales. Other types of trees, such as Maples, are most colorful in the fall season.
3. The condition of plant material after the winter season varies. Compare trees and shrubs to bears that are in hibernation. Do all of the bears come out of hibernation on the same day? Of course not. So the common sense approach to retail sales is to plan for those plants that will come out of dormancy first. Evergreens are named for their ongoing color

throughout the year. They are an early and enduring retail item throughout the spring and summer season. They exhibit hardiness in the face of winter and require little maintenance to grow. Some evergreens may have a tan or light brown color which will become greener as they leave the dormant stage. This is a reminder that COLOR SELLS (a greener evergreen will sell more quickly) but this is a reminder that the plant is still in its dormant stage and this is normal.

4. The height and container size of plant material affects the retail price. Garden Center personnel must ensure plants are arranged so all can be seen and have effective placement to highlight the best parts of that plant, such as when it is in its flowering stage. The plant location in the display plays a large part in the guest's perception. Smaller potted shrubs should be placed at an elevation where they can be seen. Larger trees should be toward the back of the display, yet still very visible. As you examine your plant material, imagine how that item will look once it has been planted because guests will ask you any number of questions about where they should place a plant. THIS IS A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY! The door is wide open for you to suggest all of the cross-over items to support the planting and growth of that GROUP of trees and shrubs. Mention fountains, bird baths, gloves, garden tools and any other item available as you stroll about answering questions.
5. Keep your feet moving. Lead the guest around to see everything you can possibly sell them. Start with that special tree or shrub, sell two of each and keep moving!