

## **1-10 Myths about Trees**

**By: Robert Bishop, Frederick County Master Gardener Program**

- 1) Before planting a tree, should I prune living branches so the crown size is in balance with the root ball?**

It is not recommended to remove any living branches when planting trees. Live twigs, branches, and trunks contain reserve stored energy in the form of starch or oil. Removing them reduces energy reserves. Remove only dead and injured branches before planting.

- 2) Is it best to plant a tree as deep as possible?**

Never plant any plant, tree or otherwise, deeper than the top of its root ball. Improper planting is the number one cause for tree and shrub death.

- 3) Do trees always need to be staked after planting?**

Trees will be stronger if not staked. The movement of young trees by wind strengthens them. If the planting site is constantly windy, stake after planting but be sure to remove stakes in 6-12 months.

- 4) How thick should I make the mulch layer for my new tree?**

Roots will begin to grow into mulch that is too deep. During hot days the mulch will dry out before the soil below it, and since those roots cannot obtain water, the tree suffers. Mulch should be only 2-3 inches deep.

- 5) Do trees grow all year round?**

90% of annual tree growth occurs 6-8 weeks after leaves are formed. Early spring defoliation by disease or insects usually will not kill a tree but will have a major impact on that years growth.

- 6) Are ants a contributor to tree decay?**

Ants make nests in trees but do not feed on them; termites do not nest in trees but do feed on them. Ants actually help slow decay in trees as they keep the galleries in their nests clean.

- 7) Can tree wounds heal?**

Healing is the repair of damaged tissue. Trees cannot heal damaged tissue. Instead they call off damaged areas from healthy areas through a process known as compartmentalization, this is their defense mechanism. The damaged tissue (decay) will remain isolated within the tree for life. Evidence of this is seen when a felled tree is examined.

- 8) Is topping good for a tree?**

After planting too deep, topping is the next major cause for tree decline and death. Topping creates weakened, stressed trees that are unsafe. NEVER top trees.

- 9) Does it aid healing to apply tree wound paint to wounds and pruning cuts?**

Tree wound paint does not prevent rot and in some cases promotes it by sealing in moisture. Do not paint wounds or pruning cuts.

**10) How should pruning cuts be made in relation to the remaining branch or trunk?**

Flush cuts destroy the tree cells that seal off the wound from the healthy part of the tree. Pruning cuts should be made on the outside of the branch collar. The branch collar is identified by a raised ring of bark that is formed when trunk and branch bark meet and push up slightly.