

Moving Established Plants in Midsummer

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Midsummer is not considered the best or easiest time to move trees and shrubs in the landscape. But, for a number of reasons, there are circumstances that require moving a plant if it is to be saved. This may include new construction, grade changes, a plant too large for the site, or moving to a new home. If midsummer transplanting is necessary and you're willing to take the risk, here are a few points to keep in mind.

First, disturb the roots as little as possible. This may be less difficult when the plant is small, but practically impossible with larger, well-established trees and shrubs. Large trees and shrubs should be left to a professional tree-moving specialist with the proper equipment. And even then, many specialists are reluctant to move a plant at this time.

Dig the plant when the soil is slightly moist so that it forms a root ball without splitting and exposing roots. Make a soil ball as large as possible, but still small enough to be manageable. The rule of thumb is for every 1-inch of caliper (or diameter) of the tree trunk, you should dig 12 inches away from the trunk. For shrubs 12 inches away from the outermost stems is sufficient. Unless the plant is quite small, which makes the job more successful, some roots will have to be cut off. Remaining roots should have good contact with the soil to support and sustain the plant.

If weather is hot and sunny, the plant should be dug and replanted as soon as possible. Be sure to dig the new planting hole at the same depth that the plant was originally growing. Use as much of the existing soil to back fill around the root ball but add some organic matter (compost, peat moss, leaf mold) to stimulate late root development beyond the existing ball. Fill in around the soil ball and add water to close air spaces and fuse the soil to the soil ball. Do not tamp or pack the soil in any way once water has been added.

A plant with root loss will not normally have enough roots to support the abundant foliage after planting at this time of year. Plants can be pruned up to 1/3 of the foliage to alleviate stress. Do not expect a newly moved plant to continue growth without interruption. Some leaf scorch is usually expected. Continue to water to keep soil moist, but do not over water. To conserve moisture and moderate soil temperature fluctuations, apply 3-4 inches of organic mulch (wood chips or leaf mold) around the base of the plant, but do not let it touch the stems.