

What is the best method for transplanting trees, shrubs & perennials?

(a) Root Washing

RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE

BEFORE STARTING ... research the best growing conditions for your plant. Plants that are well suited to their site will establish quickly, have a healthy root system and be better equipped to resist pests and diseases and will thrive and grow.

What?

ROOT WASHING is the research based method for identifying & correcting root bound trees, shrubs, and woody perennials before transplanting.

It is the process of removing the planting medium from the roots of a tree or shrub before transplanting or when re-planting a tree or shrub that had been poorly planted or is not thriving. Root washing is appropriate for plants with well defined and not fibrous root systems.

Why?

The roots of plants grown in containers for several years frequently have a crowded, distorted rooting habit and often grow around the container in a spiral. Unless roots are untangled, this spiral growth pattern will continue, resulting in poor growth, stem instability, and sometimes plant death.



coiled, crowded roots



Root girdling: a spiral root thickens over time and girdles the bole. This can lead to the plant's death.

How?

..to **WASH the ROOTS**... root washing can be done with the root ball either on the ground (which will kill your back), or in a wheelbarrow (which will kill your back more slowly). Just don't do it in the garden bed and turn the soil to mud. Steps...

- use a hose with a nozzle set on jet
- wash ALL of the planting medium off (minimize blasting roots too much). Depending on root entanglement, removal may take a few minutes to an hour or more.
- gently untangle the roots using a root hook, if available



These roots have taken on the shape of the container.

FIRST



NOTE: to see root washing in action view the VIRL Gardening Series on root washing (2).

THEN



Use a root hook to gently tease and untangle the roots.

NEXT



When?

..to **ROOT WASH**...when the plant is dormant in the fall, before the soil freezes, or early spring.

RESOURCES

PHOTO Credits:
Numbers refer to above resources, otherwise VIRL Gardening Series or VIMGA member photos

1. *Prevent girdling roots from choking out your trees.* (2021). NOVI: <https://novi.org/News/Prevent-girdling-roots-from-choking-out-your-trees.aspx>
2. Gurrad, D. (2024). *Root Prep for Successful Transplanting.* VIRL/Virtual Gardening Series: <https://my.nicheacademy.com/virl/pathway/30786/course/26567/lesson/191031>
3. Chalker-Scott, L. (2021). Why root washing is important - an illustrated cautionary tale. The Garden Professors: <https://gardenprofessors.com/why-root-washing-is-important-an-illustrated-cautionary-tale/>