Timing and Planting of Trees
By Arvid Ellison
WSU Asotin County Master Gardener

Trees have been planted in every season of the year and lived. I've seen trees planted under a hot August sun that survived; but it's not the rule. There are also those meticulous gardeners who can seem to make any plant grow, even those planted in the worst conditions. I'm not one of them. It takes a lot of patience. It also depends on the tree species. For example, it is hard to kill a Cottonwood.

So what is the best time to plant? The best time is during mid to late dormancy (January 15 – March 15 in the Lewiston/Clarkston valley). It's important to know that roots break dormancy before any visual signs, such as bud swelling, appear above the ground.

Now that you know when to plant your tree, here are some tips that not only will increase survival rates, but will also enhance growth:

1. Dig a hole at least twice the diameter of the tree's spread out root system. The hole should also be as deep as the longest roots.
2. Spread out the roots as much as possible. The top whorl of roots should be just under the surface of the ground. These are the trees main feeder roots.
3. Make sure the root crown (a point just above the top row of roots) is just at or slightly above the ground surface (more trees have died because they were planted too deep than too shallow).
4. Try to incorporate as much native soil (the dirt that you removed when digging the hole) as possible around and over the roots. Native soil is what the roots must get used to when they grow beyond their planting hole.
5. Most important – keep the roots damp while you are planting (the fine, almost microscopic root hairs will dry and die very quickly). Water well. Root hormones will help at this time (follow label instruction).

Happy tree planting and remember that the cute little tree you planted will grow up to be a monster and can overwhelm you. Allow space in your landscape design. Plan and try to visualize what that tree will look like 20 years from now.