

# Fall Gardening Tasks

Three gardening tasks to consider doing this fall:

- **Root prune a shrub that needs to be moved**
- **Renew an overgrown shrub**
- **Create a new garden bed — the easy way**

## 1 Root Prune a Shrub

Sometimes, even with planning, a tree or shrub outgrows its location or needs to be moved for another reason.

Transplanting an established tree or shrub can be risky because **many of the “feeder roots” will get damaged** in the process. Feeder roots are the small, outermost roots that absorb most of the water and nutrients.

By root pruning 6 months to a year before moving the plant, you can **minimize transplant shock**. The purpose of root pruning is to get the plant to produce a new flush of feeder roots, closer to the trunk, which can then be included when the plant is transported. Once in the new location, these new feeder roots will help the plant to survive.

For most plants, **root pruning is recommended in the fall**, followed by **transplanting in the spring**. By root pruning in the fall, the plant can grow new feeder

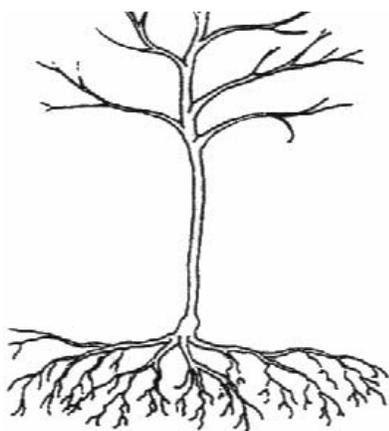
roots over the winter, when they won't be burdened by the need to support new growth.

First, decide if you can handle the job yourself. The task involves spading through roots and later moving a heavy root ball and attached plant. **Deciduous shrubs have the best success rate**. Moving trees and evergreens is more risky.

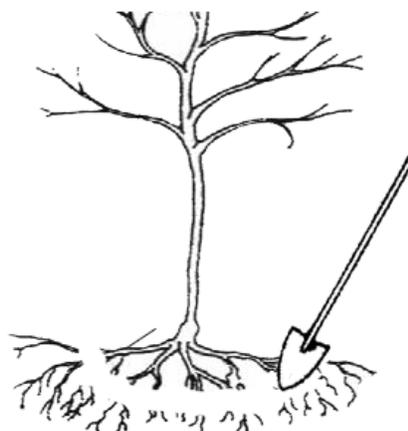
You will **probably need help for any tree or shrub larger** than the dimensions shown below:

Plant	Dimensions	Min. Root Ball Size
Small tree	Trunk 1" diameter	16" diameter
Small deciduous shrub	3ft tall	14" diameter
Small evergreen shrub	2 ft tall	14" diameter

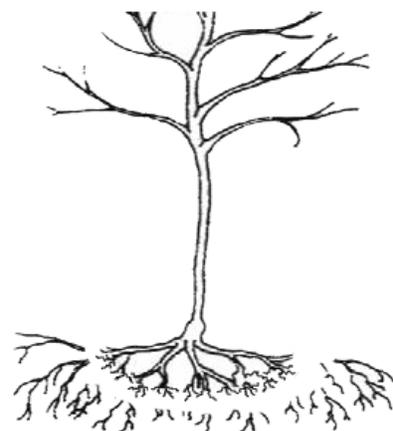
One method of root pruning is called **spading**. This method involves cutting through the roots of the plant, all the way around in a circle. New feeder roots grow in the gap.



Before root pruning



Root pruning with spade



New feeder roots

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## Overview of Steps:

- The day before, **water to soften the ground** and reduce plant root stress.
- If necessary, **wrap lower branches** to keep them out of your way.
- Using a spade, **cut a circle around the plant**. Turn the spade so that the back side faces the plant.
- The **circle should be about 4" smaller** than the final root ball diameter. New feeder roots will grow in the pruned area.
- Cut any large roots with **loppers**.
- **Replace the soil** you remove.
- After root pruning, **make sure the root ball continues to receive enough moisture**. A layer of mulch can help.
- When spring comes you are ready to **transplant**. Cut the root ball about 4" out from where you made the cut in the fall. This should include all the new feeder roots.

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**Sources:** *Transplanting or Moving Trees and Shrubs in the Landscape*, Penn State Extension; *Transplanting Established Trees & Shrubs*, Clemson Cooperative Extension

## 2 Renew a Shrub

Perhaps you have a foundation shrub that is getting overgrown. **Renewal pruning is the removal of a few of the oldest, tallest branches** of a shrub. This encourages the growth of new stems from the roots.

**Late fall is a good time for renewal pruning.** (You can also wait until early spring, but doing it now means one less thing to do in the spring.)

Prune up to **one-third of the oldest, thickest stems**, down to ground level or slightly above. In the spring, this old wood will be replaced with young healthy branches, rejuvenating the shrub.

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**Source:** *Pruning trees and shrubs*, University of Minnesota Extension

## 3 Create a New Garden Bed

Digging a new garden bed can be hard work, but if you plan ahead you can let nature do most of the work.

If the garden bed is going to replace turf or weeds, the first step is to kill the existing plant material. Rather than digging out the sod manually, you can **cover it with layers of newspaper followed by a layer of compost**. The newspaper will block the light, preventing photosynthesis.

By doing this in the fall, the **grass or weeds will die** and the **newspaper will decompose** over the winter. Come spring, you'll have a nice layer of compost that you can turn over.

There's **no need for RoundUp** or other herbicides. All it takes is time.

## Overview of Steps:

- **Define the outline** of the bed using a garden hose.
- With a spade or shovel, **edge the bed** to create a boundary for the newspaper
- Lay down a **layer of newspaper** (5-6 sheets deep). **Avoid full-color pages** or advertising supplements. Regular newspaper ink won't harm the soil, but you can't be sure about other inks.  
  
Have some compost handy to hold down the edges as you work.
- Cover the newspaper with **2-3 inches of compost**.
- Leave the bed alone until spring. The vegetation will die and the newspaper will decompose.

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**Source:** *Make Your Bed*, [www.provenwinners.com](http://www.provenwinners.com)