

New leaf in planting depth for trees

By Robert McGuire
Staff Writer

Most gardeners who have planted trees know that the planting depth is important, but they might not have known how important.

Kim Sebastian, district urban forestry coordinator with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, says that new research shows that tree depth is the culprit in a host of problems with the health of trees.



Sebastian

She will speak on the best ways to establish new trees at 3 p.m. Friday, March 1, at the Garden Show.

"Most problems are from depth," she said, including girdling roots, frost cracks and suckering, which occurs when too many sprouts appear around the base of young trees. For example, Sebastian said, "It's a myth that roots are as deep as the tree is tall." Most of a tree's roots are in the top 18 inches of soil.

Her presentation will focus on new

ways of planting that people may not know. In addition to the low-down on tree depth, gardeners can get her advice on caring for trees and even on preparing the site before the tree is bought. After all, she says, "you shouldn't just dig a hole and stuff a tree in it."

She should know. Through the DNR she has been educating people about growing trees for the last five years. Mostly, she works with professional arborists, people whose business it is to keep communities a healthy green. "We encourage communities to train their people," she said. To that end, she also helps coordinate a University of Wisconsin Extension home horticulture program which trains tree-care advisers who then give that knowledge back to the community.

And throughout southeastern Wisconsin, Sebastian helps communities earn the designation "Tree City USA" by investing time and labor (mostly labor, as any gardener knows) to care for its trees. Twenty-six cities and villages in southeastern Wisconsin carry that designation.

Sebastian says she stays busy this time of year. "It seems like in springtime people are more interested in tree care."