

How To Plant a Tree

“The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.” -Anonymous

1. Determine the tree planting location. Stay at least 15' away from the house, sidewalk, driveway and other trees. Do not plant a large tree under power lines.
2. Choose the tree species that will grow well based on existing conditions: soil pH, sun or shade and soil drainage.
3. Buy a good quality tree. Check for circling roots at the soil surface. If severe, do not purchase.
4. Buy small. Smaller trees are less expensive and experience less transplant shock. They will catch up to larger trees within a few years.
5. Remove the grass. Dig a hole twice as wide and slightly shallower than the root ball. (This loose soil promotes rapid root growth and quick establishment.) Shovel the soil onto a tarp. Leave a base of undisturbed soil for the root ball to rest on, which won't settle and sink when watered.
6. Place the tree, in it's container, in the hole to make sure the root flare (where the main roots flare outward from the base of the trunk) will be about 1” higher than the surrounding soil surface. It is always better to plant a tree a little higher rather than lower. Roughen the sides of the planting hole with a shovel to help the root tips penetrate the soil. Smooth walls are like concrete to root tips.
7. Be gentle yet firm when removing the tree from the container. If the tree is balled and burlaped, remove the twine and burlap except from the bottom of the root ball.
8. Check the root ball for circling roots. If circling roots are left in place, they will continue to enlarge in that pattern after the tree has been planted, eventually strangling or girdling the tree. Gently separate the roots and guide them downward and outward. Cut tangled roots if necessary.
9. Check to make sure that the root flare is not covered with soil. This can lead to rot at the base of the trunk.
10. Orient the tree while you have the chance and make sure the tree is straight. If the tree has a preferred side, turn it toward a prominent viewpoint.
11. The latest research suggests that it may not be helpful to amend the backfill. When the removed soil is amended, the tree roots may prefer to stay within the amended soil and not grow outward. An exception to this rule is if you are planting a tree in a larger planting bed with other plantings. In this case, you may want to add an organic amendment such as compost or mushroom manure to the entire planting bed. Add approximately one part amendment to three parts soil.
12. As you backfill the soil, minimize air pockets by tamping the soil with your foot after every few shovels of soil. An alternative method is to fill the hole with water 2 or 3 times as you backfill. Again, make sure the root flare is left uncovered!
13. Build a 4” berm around the root ball to encourage water penetration when you water.
14. Remove the existing stake. Only re-stake the tree if it can't stand up on its own. Place non-abrasive stakes on either side of the tree, outside the root ball. Remove the stakes as soon as the tree can support itself.
13. Mulch the entire planting area, except a small circle at the base of the trunk, to a depth of 2 to 3”. This conserves soil moisture, slows weed growth and helps to protect the tree from lawn mowers and weed whackers. Do not let the mulch come in contact with the tree trunk because that will encourage rot. Do not mulch too deeply (volcano mulching). Roots need oxygen!
15. Water deeply and regularly, usually once or twice a week, depending on the amount of rainfall.