

HOW AND WHERE TO PLANT A TREE

STEP 1: SELECT A SITE

Where is the best place to plant a new tree on your property? Follow these guidelines to ensure a healthy and long-lived tree!

Start by choosing a site that is...

- 🌳 35 feet from street corners
- 🌳 35 feet from the front side of traffic signs and 10 feet from the backside
- 🌳 10 to 15 feet from driveway cuts and alleys, depending on the speed of traffic
- 🌳 15 feet from streetlights and utility poles
- 🌳 15 feet from fire hydrants
- 🌳 10 feet from the edge of manhole covers, storm drains, and all underground water or utilities features

Make sure there is enough space so that your new tree is able to reach maturity, both in the canopy above and roots below. Are there overhead or below-ground utilities to consider? Are there nearby driveways or sidewalks that might affect the future of the tree or the pavement? Will your new tree provide welcome shade to your patio – or unwelcome litter in your pool?

Only small-growing trees should be planted under overhead utilities. They require at least 4 feet of growing space and should be planted 20 feet apart. Medium-growing trees need a minimum of 6-8 feet of growing space. They should be planted 30 feet apart and 20-40 feet from overhead utilities. Large growing trees need more than 8 feet of growing space, and they should be planted at least 40 feet from each other and any overhead utilities.

STEP 2: Call MISS DIG

Before planting any tree, contact MISS DIG at 800-482-7171 to identify locations of underground infrastructure, such as water and power lines. This service is free. If you are planting a tree in the City's right-of-way, you must get a permit from the City's Department of Public Services, available at the City's urban forestry website [LINK].

STEP 3: SELECT A TREE

Now, the fun part! Once you have determined what size tree your selected site will support, consult the City's Acceptable Street Trees list at [LINK]. There you will find over 100 species with their shapes, growth rates, and native status, along with notes about their visual interest and the site conditions they prefer. Do you want fragrant or showy spring blossoms? Spectacular fall color? Nuts and seeds that attract wildlife? Fruit?

Do you have a function in mind for your tree? Conifers can provide a privacy screen, and they also block cold winter winds when planted to the northwest. (Conversely, you may want to leave the southwest corner of your lot open for an unobstructed summer breeze.) Deciduous trees planted due west provide relief from the late-afternoon summer sun but allow winter rays to filter in.

Take a look around your neighborhood, too. Are there trees nearby of the same species? If there are many species nearby that are the same, consider planting something different. We want to create a diverse urban forest!

STEP 4: DIG

This step varies slightly depending on if your tree is bare root, in a container, or balled & burlapped.

Bare Root: Keep the roots of the bare root tree moist and protected at all times prior to planting. Prepare the planting hole for each plant before removing it from its protected site. Using a tree spade, prepare a shallow hole that is large enough to spread the roots without crowding, approximately 4 feet across. Rough the sides of the hole to make sure they are not glazed from digging, which would form a barrier for roots and water. Inspect the roots before planting and prune away any damaged roots. Place the roots in the hole at a level so that the soil surface will be at the same level where the plant was previously growing, as indicated by the slightly darker area of the trunk. It often helps to create a small mound in the bottom of the hole and place the roots over that. *In general, it is better to plant too high than too deep.*

Balled & Burlapped: Dig the hole 2-3 times as wide as the diameter of the root ball, creating a large area of loosened soil allows the roots to establish more easily. Dig the hole no deeper than the height of the trunk flare. The trunk flare is the point where roots spread at the base of the tree and should be partially visible after the tree has been planted. *In general, it is better to plant too high than too deep.* **To avoid damage to the tree while planting, always lift the tree by the root ball, never by the trunk.** Remove as much wire, string, burlap, and plastic as possible. It is not necessary to completely remove these materials, but push them down well below the soil surface. Be sure to remove all twine from around the trunk of the tree to allow for plant growth. Be careful not to fracture the root ball.

Containers: Dig the hole at least 2 times wider than the container. The depth of the hole should be the same as the soil in the container. Gently lay the containerized tree on the ground and slide the tree out of the container. If the roots are circling the inside of the container, gently but aggressively break up only the offending roots to encourage normal root growth and prevent tree girdling. Circling or girdling roots may lead to premature tree death. Place in intact root ball in the hole. The root flare should be 1" above the final soil surface.

STEP 5: BACKFILL

Make sure the tree stands straight and start backfilling the soil. Have someone view the tree from multiple directions to confirm the tree is straight. It is difficult to straighten the tree once you begin backfilling.

Using a shovel, fill the hole about 1/3 full of soil and gently pack the soil around the base of the roots.

Fill the remainder of the hole with soil. Do not stomp the soil with your feet, as this will compact it too much. Deeply water the tree as described in step 7. You do not need to fertilize at time of planting.

Stakes should only be used to support trees on windy sites or for smaller trees with weak trunks. If needed, place two to three 4-foot stakes about 10 inches from the trunk before backfilling. Ties should have a flat, smooth surface and be somewhat elastic – the tree should be able to sway slightly in the wind in order to establish a strong root system. Wire covered with hose or tubing should not be used. All stakes and ties should be removed after the first year.

STEP 6: MULCH

Form an earth berm around the edge of the planting hole and add a 2-4" layer of mulch. This will retain moisture, moderate soil temperature extremes, and reduce competition from grass and weeds. Leave a 3" mulch-free zone around the base of the tree to avoid moist bark conditions that could lead to decay.

STEP 7: WATER

Newly transplanted trees may have lost much of their root system, so watering is a critical element of successful establishment. Thoroughly water the tree once a week in dry conditions throughout the first two summers. A good watering is 15-20 gallons applied slowly with a hose for approximately 30 minutes per week within the mulched area around the tree.