



# How to Plant a Tree



TreeCanada

A vertical photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense forest of tall, leafy green trees. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating dappled light on the path. In the foreground, a man and a woman are jogging towards the camera. Further down the path, several children are walking. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

# Trees make our world a beautiful place.

They provide us with many lasting benefits - shade, privacy, increased property value, shelter and food, and they contribute to our mental well-being.

**Planting trees** is one small way each of us can help improve the environment. Tree planting is easy if you follow these simple steps and remember to “keep the green side up!”



# PLAN AHEAD

Think about what the tree will look like at maturity. How tall will it grow? What shape will it have? Will it fit in the space you have once it is full-grown? Would a coniferous (evergreen) or deciduous tree work better in your landscape?

A tree's shape, height, size at maturity and function in your landscape will determine the best tree to plant in a particular location.

Before doing any digging, make sure to request underground utility locates to check for buried cables and wires on your property. Call your local municipality to learn who to contact and do not plant tall-growing trees close to overhead utility lines.

Tree Canada encourages planting native species appropriate to your local climate, light, soil, moisture conditions, and space availability.

# WHEN TO PLANT



**DECIDUOUS** trees can be planted in the spring, as soon as the frost is out of the ground, or in the fall, from leaf-fall until freeze-up.



**CONIFERS** can be planted early in the spring until four weeks after deciduous trees have opened their leaves, or in the fall, from about the first week of August to the end of October.

# PLANTING Steps

## MINIMIZE STRESS TO YOUR TREES

Protect your tree well during transport by padding the trunk and branches gently with burlap and tying loose ends with soft rope or twine.

Plant as soon as possible after delivery. If planting is not possible right away, store the tree in a cool, shaded area and water as needed to keep the roots and soil moist.



## PREPARE THE PLANTING SPOT

Dig a hole two to three times wider than the container or root ball. The hole should only be as deep as the root ball. When placed in the hole, the root collar (i.e. where the roots join the main stem or trunk) should be equal to or slightly above the depth of the hole.

Roughen the sides and bottom of the hole to allow root penetration.



## PLANT YOUR TREE WITH CARE

For trees in containers, gently slide the root ball out of the pot and into the hole. For burlapped trees, place the root ball in the hole and gently cut away the wire basket and burlap.

Plant the tree so that the top of the root ball is flush with the top of the hole and the tree is vertical. Fill the hole in and around the root ball with the soil removed from the hole or good quality soil. Do not return any grass or sod to the hole.



Gently pack the soil around the root ball until the hole is two-thirds full to remove air pockets. Fill the remaining space with water to settle the soil and allow the hole to drain. Finish filling the hole with soil and make a ridge of soil around the root ball to direct water towards the roots.

# TAKING CARE OF YOUR TREE



**MULCH:** Apply two to four inches of mulch around the tree over the area of the root ball to reduce the growth of weeds and retain water in the soil. Be sure to keep mulch two to three inches away from the trunk of the tree.

**WATERING:** Water slowly and deeply immediately after planting and once a week or more as needed during dry conditions to keep the soil moist.



**FERTILIZING:** Avoid applying fertilizer, except for bone meal or high phosphorus fertilizer, in the first year after planting. A higher nitrogen fertilizer can be applied later on for greening and top growth.

**STAKING:** Staking trees is not necessary unless they are exposed to high winds or if the soil is shallow. Remove stakes after one year.



**PRUNING:** Prune at planting to improve branch spacing and promote a strong structure by removing dead, damaged, or rubbing branches. Trees should be pruned while dormant in late fall or early spring.

## LEARN MORE

Original website text says: Reproduced with permission from Canadian Forest Service – Natural Resources Canada. 1992 ISBN 0-622-19536-1

Canadian Forest Service – Natural Resources Canada: A Guide to Planting Trees for Urban Residents brochure 2005

<https://cvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/14-035-howto-plant-factsheet-web.pdf>

<https://cvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/14-035-howto-plant-factsheet-web.pdf>

<https://www.arborday.org/trees/planting/containerized.cfm>

<https://www.arborday.org/trees/planting/balled-burlapped.cfm>

City of Ottawa – Trees for Tomorrow brochure

Credit Valley Conservation Tree planting service factsheet on planting potted plants

ISA Trees are Good <https://www.treesaregood.org/treeowner/plantingatree>

*For detailed information, please visit  
[treecanada.ca/plantatree](https://treecanada.ca/plantatree)*

Or consult your local garden centre, district agriculturalist, forester or forest technician, library, or tree nursery staff on proper planting procedures for individual species or tree nursery staff on proper planting procedures for individual species in your area.



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