

Spring – Hot Topic



so you want to plant a tree... tips for choosing the right tree for the site to getting it in the ground

Planting a tree near your home or in your community is a great idea. There are many reasons why you may want to plant a tree including:

- memorial/gift
- privacy
- reduce soil erosion
- winter windbreak
- summer cooling
- reduce air pollution
- increase property value
- fall color and /or spring blooms
- fruits and nuts
- wildlife habitat
- landscape design
- sight or sound barrier

In order to ensure that your tree planting is a success, there are several things to keep in mind:

- **SITE**—choose a site that has good soil, water and light conditions and gives the tree plenty of room to grow. Beware of buried utility lines!
- **TREE SELECTION**—select a tree species that will thrive in your chosen site and that meets your goals for planting a tree.
- **QUALITY**—know what to look for when purchasing a tree from a nursery or garden center.
- **TRANSPORTATION and STORAGE**—know how to safely transport your tree to the planting site and store it for a short period of time if immediate planting is not feasible.
- **PLANTING and CARING**—know how to properly plant and care for the tree in order to give it the greatest chance for surviving and thriving.

1. In selecting a **SITE** to plant a tree you want to make sure to look up, down, and all around! The main thing to notice in looking up is if there are any utility lines nearby, if so how far away? Are there buried utility lines? Contact your local power company if you are not sure. In looking down, think about a tree's roots that are a main part of its life support system, drawing up water and nutrients from the soil. A tree's roots extend well beyond its branches. Is there enough room for the roots to spread out? In looking all around, are there buildings, other trees or shrubs, sidewalks, curbs, streets nearby? How does the site fit into the larger environment? Is it a sunny or shady spot? What is the predominant wind direction?

Besides the physical location where the tree is to be planted, think about the **SOIL** that it is going into. Is it a sandy soil that water rapidly moves through, leaving your tree high and dry? Or is it a clay soil that may hold water for too long? The pH of a soil indicates its acidity or alkalinity. Most plants do best in soil pH between 5.5-7.0. Is the soil easy to dig into? If not it may be compacted. You may want to consider having your soil tested by your local Extension agent or at a local garden center. They

could make recommendations if any soil improvements are needed. How deep is the soil? Trees need about 30 inches of good soil to be healthy.

2. In **SELECTING A TREE** to match the site the most important thing to remember is that a tree grows! Try to envision what this tree will look like in 10 and 50 years? How tall will the tree get and how wide? How fast will it grow? What shape will it be? Does this particular type of tree like sun or shade, a dry soil or can it tolerate a wetter soil? What will the flowers and fruits be like? What is its fall color? Are there many of this same type of tree in the community? Having a large variety of trees in an ecosystem makes the entire ecosystem healthier and helps your tree to avoid possible insect and disease outbreaks. Also, selecting a tree that is highly suited to the site you have chosen will result in a healthier tree which is better able to survive stresses such as insects, diseases, pollution, drought, injury, wind, snow, or ice storms.

For more information about selecting the right tree for your site, check out these publications:

[“Tree Selection” bulletin from the International Society of Arboriculture:](#)

[“The Right Tree Handbook” produced by the University of Minnesota, Northern States Power, and Minnesota Power.](#)

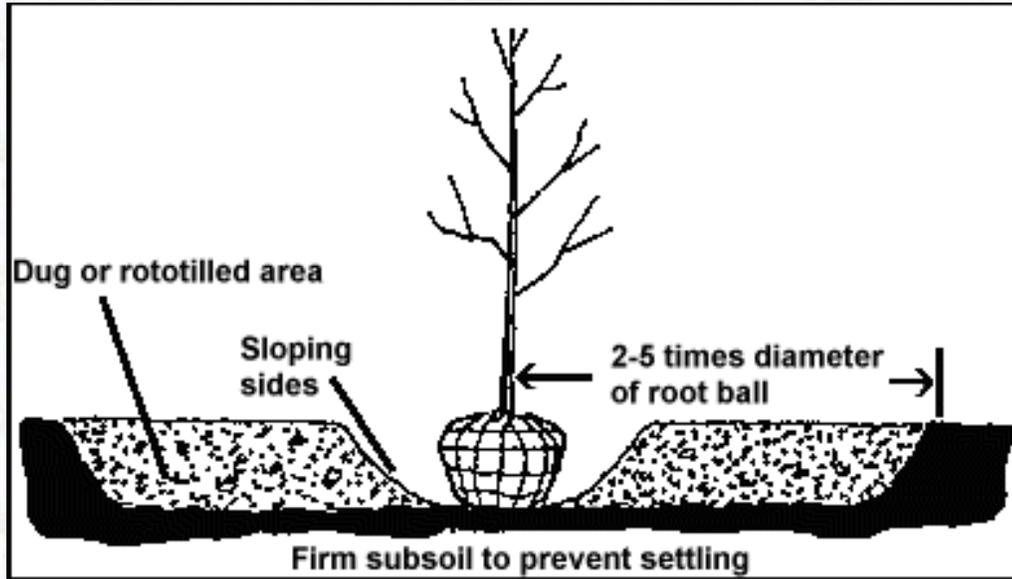
3. In **PURCHASING YOUR TREE** it is very important to remember that how it was grown in the nursery will influence its chances for a successful transplant to the location you have chosen. In choosing your tree remember “R.I.F” –roots, injuries, and form. **ROOTS:** is there an adequately sized root ball? The diameter of the root ball should be at least 10-12 times the diameter of the trunk. Are the roots healthy, not obviously crushed or torn? **INJURIES:** is the trunk free from mechanical wounds or wounds from incorrect pruning? Injuries could be hidden beneath trunk wraps. **FORM:** does the tree have good, strong form with branches evenly spaced along the trunk and strong attachments to the trunk?

For more information about purchasing a high-quality tree, check out this publication:

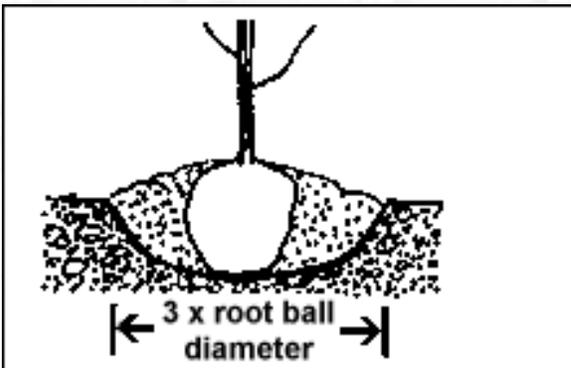
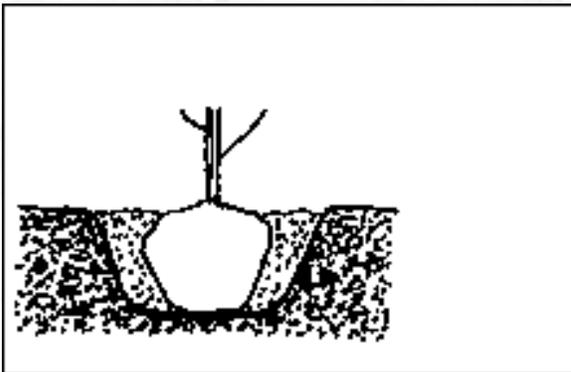
[“Buying High-Quality Trees” bulletin from the International Society of Arboriculture:](#)

4. Carefully **TRANSPORTING** your tree to the planting site will also increase the chance for a successful planting. Using a larger vehicle with a trunk or a trailer can reduce the chance of injuring the tree. Gently wrap the leaves or needles to protect them from the sun and wind. Be sure to cushion the stem and branches, and tie the tree down securely. Avoid traveling at high speeds. Ideally the tree should be planted immediately, but if this is not possible keep the tree roots moist and **STORE** away from direct exposure to wind and sun, preferably in a shady spot outdoors.

5. **PLANTING THE TREE**, finally! In digging the hole remember that most of a tree's roots grow horizontally, just below the soil surface and can spread out well beyond the branches, so the hole should be big enough to give the roots a chance to spread out. Make the hole wide, at least two to three times the width of the root ball especially if the soil is compacted and hard, but only as deep as the root ball. The best way to make sure you plant the tree at the right depth is to identify the trunk flare where the roots spread out at the base of the tree. This point should be partially visible after planting. Make sure the tree is straight in the hole before backfilling.

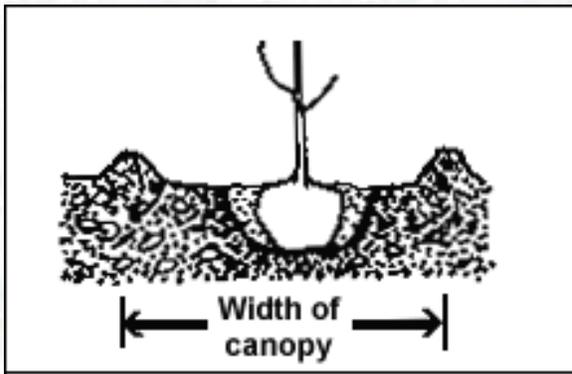


How Deep Should You Plant?



Under normal conditions, root growth is best encouraged by planting even with the surrounding terrain.

When wet conditions or heavy soil are problems, raising about 1/3 of the root ball above ground will aid the spread of lateral roots.



In arid climates, a basin can be used to collect precious water.

Illustrations provided by the **National Arbor Day Foundation**, Tree City USA
Bulletin No. 19

For additional information and illustrations on tree planting check out the bulletins at the [National Arbor Day Foundation](#)

Staking is usually not necessary, however if staking is necessary for support, use two stakes and a wide flexible tie material to reduce the chance of injuring the tree. Place mulch at the base of the tree. Mulch helps the soil to retain moisture, reduces competition from grass and weeds, and protects the trunk from injury due to lawn mowers, weed whackers, and other harmful objects. Mulch 2-4 inches deep 3-4 feet out and do not put right next to the trunk. Keep the soil moist but not soaked. Water about once a week, more frequently during hot weather, continuing until mid-fall.

For more information about planting a new tree, check out this publication:
["New Tree Planting" bulletin from the International Society of Arboriculture:](#)

After planting care of your tree is very important to keep it happy and healthy! Inspecting your tree regularly will help you to see potential problems before it's too late. See the International Society of Arboriculture's "[Mature Tree Care](#)" bulletin. Be sure to keep the mulch intact and replace as needed to maintain the 2-4 inch depth. Keep weeds from invading the planting site by hand-pulling them as chemicals can harm the tree. Weeds and other vegetation compete with tree roots for moisture and nutrients. Continue to water as needed for the first few years, especially during drought conditions. Fertilization, only if necessary, should be done with care and in the fall of the tree's second growing season. Over-fertilization or improper fertilization can be harmful to a tree. For more information on fertilization see "[Fertilizing Landscape Trees and Shrubs.](#)" Pruning is very important and will help the tree grow properly and safely. See "[How to Prune Trees](#)" by the USDA Forest Service. For additional information about tree care, see the National Arbor Day Foundation's "[9 Things You Should Know About Trees.](#)"

Asking the right questions and following these tips will greatly increase the chances that the tree you have chosen will last a long time!

For further tree planting information:

Within the 20 Midwest and Northeastern states contact: <http://www.fs.fed.us/na/coopters.html>

Outside of our 20 state area: <http://www.firstgov.gov/>

