

How to Plant Trees and Shrubs



Whether you have purchased a container-grown plant, or one that is ball-and-burlapped (B&B), remember that these plants will have the tendency to dry out quickly. Plant as soon as possible! If you must “hold” the plants for a while, keep them in a cool, sheltered area out of

strong wind and direct sunlight. If you hold them more than a week, heel them in with organic mulch (such as sphagnum moss, leaves, or sawdust). Try not to lift containerized or B&B plants by the trunk or crown; handle them by the soil ball or pot.

How to Plant

Before you dig, put down a sheet of plastic or canvas next to the hole. The soil you remove can be put on the plastic, making it easier to clean up afterward. Mixing in soil amendments will be neater, too.

In loose, well-drained soil, dig the hole at least twice the size of the container or B&B root ball. Flatten the bottom of the hole and stand in it to firm the soil so that the plant doesn't settle in deeper later.

Plastic pots: Plastic pots *must* be removed. Invert the pot and give it a sharp tap to remove the plant. If the root ball does not slide out, cut the side of the pot until it can be removed. If the roots are heavily matted or wrapping in a circular pattern, loosen them with your fingers or cut the outer circling roots with a sharp knife.

Fiber Pots: Plants in **fiber or paper mâché pots** can be left in these pots. However, the upper $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the pot should be cut away. You may also slash the bottom and sides in several places to hasten pot deterioration. No part of a fiber pot should be exposed after planting.

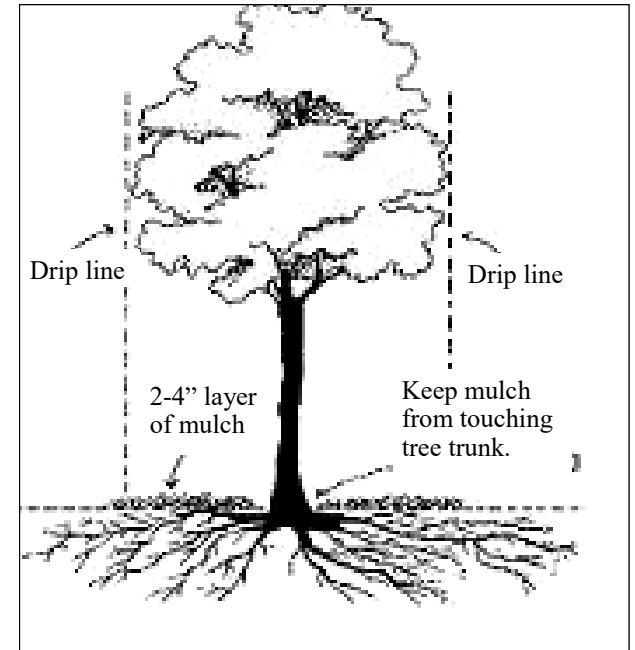
Important Planting Tip

Whether containerized or B&B, keep the original height of the soil in the pot at the same level or slightly higher than the surrounding soil level.

Balled-and-Burlapped Plants: B&B plants should be set in the hole with twine, burlap, and wire basket intact. Center the plant and stabilize it with 4-6” of soil around the bottom of the hole. The top of the soil ball should be level with the surrounding soil surface. Next, cut all twine or wire from the top of the soil ball and the trunk. Completely remove wire baskets, taking care not to disturb the soil of the root ball. Roll back the burlap to below the soil surface. If the burlap is made of plastic, remove it completely. Next, you will backfill with loose soil that has been amended with organic matter. Depending on your soil type, amendments can include peat moss, sand, or composted manure. To avoid burning the roots, do not put dry fertilizers or fresh manure in the backfill mix!

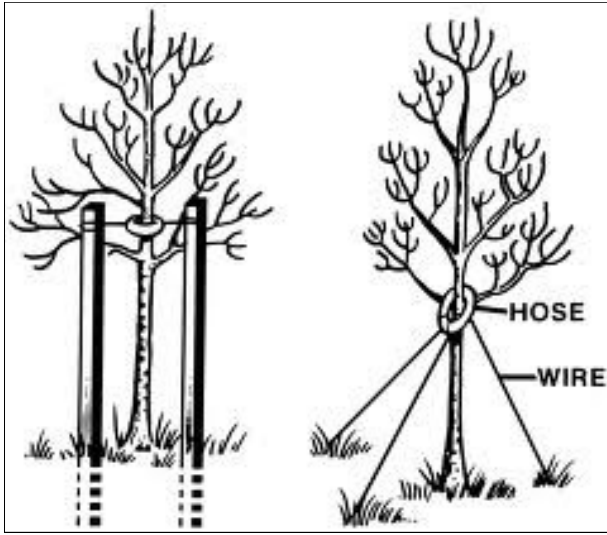
Create a Dike

With the remaining soil mix, create a slightly mounded “dike” or dam around the planting hole. Mulch the plant with an organic mulch of $1\frac{1}{2}$ ” to 2” thick. Avoid very high, thick mulches around the plant. The mulch should be in a thin layer adjacent to the base of the plant; increase the depth to about 2 inches as you move away from the plant. You do not want mulch to be piled up against the bark of the tree, as this will invite insects and/or disease. Mulch helps to conserve moisture, prevent runoff, deter weed growth, and protect against the shrub or tree's worst enemies—damage from weed eaters and lawn mowers. It also presents a clean, finished appearance.



Staking

Drive stakes into the ground before you backfill the hole, to be sure you don't drive the stakes through the root ball and damage the roots. Newly planted trees and tall shrubs need to be staked for protection against wind damage. While this protection is essential, a tree that is **too** securely staked will not develop natural strength of its own. For that reason, always allow for some movement of the trunk in the wind. The tree or shrub will develop its own support, and staking will no longer be necessary. Usually one year is long enough. Do not allow the staking material to remain so long that it actually bites into the bark. This can seriously damage and/or girdle your tree. Larger trees should be guyed. To guy a tree, use three wires attached to three stakes. Thread a one foot piece of hose on each wire and have the hose-covered bit of wire loop around the tree at the lowest branch crotches. Make loops around the trunk very loose to avoid damaging the tree. Drive stakes into firm soil at least 18 inches outside the perimeter of the planting hole.



Anchor the loose ends of the wires securely to stakes. Remove the stakes and guys before the wire girdles the trunk.

Generally, remove supports after one growing season for a 1-inch diameter tree, two seasons for a 2-inch diameter tree. For larger trees, guys may need to remain for three seasons or more. They should be inspected annually and adjusted to prevent trunk girdling.

Important Planting Tip

Good deep watering is better than frequent shallow watering.

Watering

It is important to get the root system to branch into the surrounding area. During the first year, feed regularly every three to four weeks with a water-soluble fertilizer. Initially, water weekly. Soak each plant with the open end of a hose at the base of the plant. Keep moving the end of the hose all around the base to soak the root zone completely.

If a hose is not readily available, provide at least 5 gallons of water to shrubs and 10 gallons of water to trees. Water slowly to avoid runoff. Gradually increase the intervals between watering to encourage the root system to expand.

Key Points

- Plan before planting. Choose plants that fit your landscape and soil type.
- Plant as soon as possible to prevent plants from drying out.
- Handle plants carefully at all times.
- Make the hole large enough, two to three times wider than the soil ball, the container, or the bare root.
- Always plant at the same depth at which the tree or shrub was originally growing.
- When backfilling, amend the soil with organic matter suitable to your soil type (ex., sand for clay soil; sphagnum peat for sandy soil).
- During the first year, fertilize regularly every three to four weeks with a water-soluble fertilizer.
- Support tall trees with at least three wires and stakes.
- Be sure plants get adequate water for the en-

Information was gathered from Purdue University Extension Service brochure HO-100-W, and *Helping Hand Tips*, Bennett's Greenhouse, Lafayette, IN.

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