



How to Plant a Tree

You have the tree, you have the site, and now you need to plant. Unfortunately, planting isn't as simple as digging a hole and sticking your tree into it. Planting is its own science and doing it improperly can lead to tree decay and death. Use our guide below to give your tree its best start in its forever home.

1. Locate Root Flare

The root flare is where the first major roots extend out from the tree trunk (see photo at right). Once planted, the root flare should sit just above the top of the soil, including any mulch that may be added.



2. Dig Shallow Planting Hole

Now that you have located the root flare, dig a hole that will allow the flare to sit just above the soil. The hole should be 2-3x the width of the container and have a flat bottom with no loose soil to avoid having the tree sink over time. If you accidentally dig the hole too deep, add soil and pack it down to create a solid bottom. Save the dug up soil to refill the hole later.

3. Remove Tree From Pot

To loosen the roots, gently roll the pot sideways on the ground like a rolling pin. While sideways, carefully remove the planting. Difficulty with removal means the plant needs to be loosened more.

4. Examine Roots

Take a good look at the roots of your tree. If the roots have filled out the pot and are now growing in a circle, it is necessary to redirect them. Circling roots will stunt the growth of the tree and can lead to its demise. Cut into the bottom edges of the root system at 4-5 evenly spaced locations. Massage the bottom of the roots gently until some tendrils break their tight formation and come free.

5. Place Tree in Hole

Orient your tree how you would like it to grow, ensuring the root flare is aboveground. A buried root flare will lead to rotting over time, compromising the health and safety of your tree.

6. Fill in Hole

Backfill the hole with the soil you previously dug out, patting it down with your feet between each layer. Soil that is too loose can destroy the roots, while overly compacted soil will make it difficult to grow. Remaining soil can be spread around the perimeter of the hole in order to not cover the root flare. Avoid amendments such as fertilizers and compost.

7. Water Tree

Give your new tree a nice drink of water to remove excess air pockets, pack soil, and reduce stress from transplanting. Long, slow waterings are best to make sure the water is fully absorbed by the soil instead of running off.

8. Mulch

Spread bark mulch or arborist wood chips 2-3' deep around the base of the tree. Keep the mulch about a hands-width away from the stem to avoid rotting.



9. Stake

If your tree cannot support itself after transplanting, a stake can be used to prop it up while it grows strong enough to stand on its own. A tree without stakes will develop the roots to hold itself up faster than a tree that is staked, so only do so if necessary. Use a proper tree tie such as a chain-lock to secure the tree to the stake, placing it as low as possible while still keeping the tree standing. Remove ties within 1-2 years.

10. Protect Tree

Sequoia and Redwood saplings will need protection from animals and people until they are 6' tall or larger. Use of metal fencing held in place by 3-4 stakes is recommended (see picture). A diameter of 6-10 feet is recommended so the tree can grow without interference. Extending the mulch so it is outside the tree protection will reduce vegetative competition.



Congratulations! You have successfully planted a gift for the collective future we hope to save. Tend to your tree lovingly and your legacy will live on in its heartwood, carrying your love beyond your lifetime.

*Adapted from Trees for Seattle web page: <http://www.seattle.gov/trees/htm>