

# New tree planting

Generally, plant trees and shrubs so that they may develop freely without crowding each other, houses or utility lines.

**Before selection:** determine the mature size of the tree by consulting nursery personnel, catalogs, garden books, or extension publications. Be sure to get the correct information for the specific variety of your tree.

Many shrubs and round-headed trees grow about as wide as they grow tall, so if figures for width are unavailable, estimate from the ultimate height. Ex.: a tree that grows between 10 and 15 feet tall will commonly spread its branches about the same distance, and should be planted about 7-to-8-ft.—or about half its height—away from houses or other structures.

Careful placement can reduce maintenance problems. Place shade trees away from the home or other buildings. Keep in mind that in the years to come, the tree will sometimes lose branches in storms. For this reason, oaks and other strong-wooded shade trees should be placed at least 20 ft. away from buildings and utility lines.

Place soft-wooded trees such as soft maple at an even greater distance. In relation to one another, large shade trees should be placed about 50 ft. from each other for best results.

Medium-sized trees such as red maple or river birch should be spaced about 35 ft. apart. Dogwood, redbud, hawthorn, crab or other small trees may be planted 15-to-20 ft. apart and at least 8 ft. from buildings.

**Shrubs, hedges—**  
Spacing is also a consideration for shrubs and hedges. Shrubs should be spaced about one-half of their ultimate spread from buildings.

Place different varieties of shrubs about one-half the total spread for both plants (ex., an 8-ft. shrub and a 6-ft. shrub should be spaced about 7-ft. apart. Hedges may be spaced closer together to

form a full, dense screen. Low hedge plants (3-to-4 ft. high) should be spaced about 18-inches apart, while tall hedge plants will need to be 3-to-4-ft. apart.

## Planting: 8 steps

The best time to plant trees and shrubs is during the dormant season; in fall after leafdrop or early spring before budbreak. Cool weather lets plants establish roots in their new location before spring rains and summer heat stimulate new growth.

However, if the tree has been properly cared for in the nursery or garden center, it's okay to plant throughout the growing season. Proper planting ensures a healthy future for new trees and shrubs.

Proper planting involves an 8-step process:

**1) Dig a large planting hole.** After locating all utility lines, dig the hole as deep as the root ball and twice as wide.

**2) Prune just a little—**Check for injury to roots or branches. If any roots are crushed, cut them at a point just in front of the break. On the top, prune only broken branches, making sure to leave the branch collar (swollen area where one branch meets another) intact. Begin corrective pruning after a full season of growth in the new location.

**3) Prepare the hole and soil.** While some newly transplanted trees may benefit from an application of plant food, it is best not to use fertilizer until the plant is well-established. Good, rich native soil placed in the hole is usually adequate. Never apply high nitrogen fertilizer at planting time; it may burn tender roots.

## 4) Place the tree at the proper height.

To avoid damage, always lift the tree by the root ball, never by the trunk. Add soil to the hole to raise the tree to its original growing level. (This level is marked by a dark stain on the trunk which indicates the difference between the root and trunk bark.)

**5) Fill the hole, gently but firmly.** Cut the string and remove whatever burlap you can. If the tree's in a plantable basket,

perforate the sides in four or five places and break off the top rim.

**6) Firm the earth** around the tree to eliminate air pockets. Settle the soil with water and add soil to the hole until the tree is firmly placed.

Don't use your feet to tamp the ground; it'll cause compaction.

**7) Stake the tree if needed.** Staking can damage the bark, so avoid it if possible. Use a broad, soft

strapping material such as woven belt fabric or padded wire.

Drive two or three stakes into the ground just outside the perimeter of the planting

hole, an equal distance apart.

For each stake, attach one end of the strapping material to the tree at the lowest practical level to keep it upright; fasten the other end to the stake.

Remove the stakes as soon as the tree is firmly rooted.

**8) Mulch with 2-to-4-inches** to conserve moisture and protect the newly planted roots from extreme temperatures.

**9) Water often.** Regular watering helps develop a strong new root system. Water new trees at least once a week if it doesn't rain, more often during hot weather.

—Source: *The International Society of Arboriculture*



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