

1. **Measure**

Find the trunk flare, the area above the roots where the tree naturally widens. The trunk flare should be 1-2 inches above ground level after planting. Many nursery trees come with the trunk flare buried or below soil level. Gently brush away the loose dirt on top of the roots until you get to the first large root, this is the top of the root ball.

2. **Dig**

Dig a wide, shallow saucer-shaped hole no deeper than the root ball and at least three times as wide as the root ball. The tree's roots will need room to grow out away from the planting hole. Many trees die because they are planted too deeply.

3. **Position**

Stand back and look at your tree. Position its strong side—with the best branching and form—facing the direction you want.

- For containerized trees: tap on the sides of the pot to loosen the root ball and gently remove the tree from its container. Remove the tree by sliding it out of the pot; don't pull on or handle the tree by its trunk. Gently loosen the soil at the bottom of the root ball with your fingers.
- For balled and burlap trees: wire cages and burlap protect the root ball during transport but must be removed at planting. First, cut away the twine wrapped around the trunk of the tree to find the trunk flare. Remove the bottom of the wire cage with wire snips, leaving the sides and top of the cage on the root ball. Use the handles of the cage to position the tree in the hole. Once the tree is in place, cut down the side of the wire cage and unwrap and remove the wire cage from the tree. Remove twine, wrapping materials and as much burlap as possible without tearing roots. Be careful not to cut or damage the bark.
- If there are any larger roots that circle the root ball, gently loosen them so they will grow away from the trunk or cut them cleanly with pruning shears. Circling roots can damage or kill the tree as it grows.
- The bottom of the root ball should rest on undisturbed soil to prevent it from settling too deeply in the hole. Stand back and look at the tree to make sure it is straight. Remove all tree tags and wires from the trunk.

4. **Fill**

- Use the same soil you dug from the hole to backfill around the tree. You can add up to 25% compost if you have poor soil. Gently firm the first layer of soil around the base of the root ball to keep it in place.
- Once the hole is halfway filled, water thoroughly to settle the soil around the root ball; don't step on or compact the backfill. Continue filling the hole making sure the trunk flare stays positioned above ground level. After filling the hole, the trunk flare and top of the root ball should be slightly above ground level with all the roots covered with soil.

5. **Water**

Make a ring of soil 4-6 inches high around the outer edge of the planting hole to capture water and direct it to the root ball. Water very thoroughly and slowly; you really can't water too much at this point.

6. **Mulch**

Apply a 3-4 inch layer of bark or other organic matter on top of the entire planting area keeping it 4 inches away from the trunk. The mulch will keep the soil cool and moist, and will protect the tree from lawn maintenance equipment. Do not use rocks or plastic mulch under trees.

7. **Stake *only if necessary***

Most trees will not need staking, and they will grow stronger without staking. Use stakes if you are in a high wind area or your tree is very small, or if the tree is in a place where it needs protection. Position the stakes outside the root ball and deeply enough to stay firmly in place. Do not use wire, twine, or rope around the trunk of the tree. Use soft webbing, rubber, or cloth instead, and leave enough slack between the stake and the tree to allow the tree to move in the wind without rubbing. Remove all stakes within 2 years of planting.

