

How to Plant a Tree

1 Before planting, call 811 to locate underground utility lines for free



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

2 Mark where you'll plant your tree and dig a circle 2-3 times the diameter of your tree's container. The hole should be no deeper than 1 foot.



3 Remove your tree from its container or cloth bag.



4 Prep your tree for planting by finding the root flare. The root flare is where the base of the tree flares into the roots. Carefully remove the top layer of soil, stopping before you get close to the trunk, until you find the first root the size of a finger. Remove soil from around the entire tree so the root flare is exposed on all sides.



5 Make a vertical slice every few inches around the tree's root ball to prevent circling roots. Circling roots can strangle a tree as it grows and make it more prone to fall during heavy winds.



6 Lower your tree into the hole. Place your shovel handle across the hole to provide a guide for the surrounding ground level. Ensure that the exposed root flare is at, or slightly above, ground level. Add or remove soil until the correct depth is met.



7 Use your shovel as a guide to confirm your tree is sitting vertical. Add or remove soil to the hole until it is. Be careful to maintain the root flare at ground level.



8 Once your tree is sitting level, backfill the planting hole to roughly half full with the original soil. Pour one bucket of water around the planting hole to settle the soil and remove air pockets.



9 Fill in the planting hole with the remaining soil and build a berm (or donut) around the perimeter. Again, make sure the root flare is still exposed.



10 Apply a 2-4 inch layer of mulch around your tree. Mulch should be held back from the trunk and root flare—wet mulch can rot the trunk leading to disease and death.



11 Place a tree guard over the trunk. Attach either a watering bag or 5 gallon bucket with a 1/8 inch hole drilled near the bottom. If using a bucket, make sure the hole is pointing towards the trunk.

Continued Care for Tree Health

- Continue watering 5-15 gallons of water weekly for at least the next 2 years
- Water from ground thaw to freeze and remove bags or buckets during winter months
- Prune broken or dead branches and those crossed or rubbing together
- Remove tree guard and watering accessories as the tree grows to prevent damage
- Replenish mulch yearly to conserve moisture, control weeds, and prevent damage from lawn-mowing equipment
- Consider planting native plants under and around your tree to support the food web
- For guidance on preventing wildlife damage to your new tree, see: www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-prevent-wildlife-damage-trees-and-shrubs