



How to Plant a Tree

Step-by-step guide



Background

One of the simplest and most effective ways to attract wildlife to your backyard is to plant native trees and shrubs. Remember that moving day will be a shock for seedlings and saplings. Make sure trees and shrubs get a healthy start on your property.

Procedure

Follow these important steps when planting seedlings:

- Choose early mornings, evenings, and rainy days to do the work. Avoid transplanting seedlings under the hot sun.
- Keep the roots moist at all times, but don't immerse them in water.

- Mix the soil well. Peat moss and well-rotted compost or aged manure are good additives for most soils.
- For each seedling, remove a patch of sod about 3 cm to 6 cm square and dig a hole 3 cm to 10 cm deep. For large plants, the hole should be wider and deeper than the root ball. Allow at least 15 cm of extra space around a root.
- Leave a radius of at least 1 m between plantings. Consult with an expert on the spacing required between each species of tree or shrub.
- Plant trees 1 cm deeper than when they were growing at the nursery.
- Gently spread the roots so they don't curl up against the sides of the hole.
- Add soil gradually and use your heel to pack it firmly around the roots. Fill the hole from the bottom to the top to eliminate air pockets. Do not press very wet soil or it will become too compacted.
- Water the tree immediately if possible. Add the water slowly and let it soak in before adding more.

Observe the following steps when transplanting saplings:

- Research the mature height and width of native trees and shrubs before deciding which species to plant.
- Saplings should be less than 1 m tall for best results. Small trees have a better chance of surviving.
- Dig carefully around the tree. Remove it gently from the ground with a ball of soil still clinging to the roots. Be careful not to injure or break any roots.
- Carry the sapling to its new home with a burlap bag wrapped around the roots.
- The hole you dig to transplant the sapling should be wider than the root system and deep enough that the sapling can be planted a little deeper than it was before.

- Remove the bag. Place the tree in the newly dug hole and pack the soil tightly around the roots with your bare hands. Flood it with water and pack it down again.
- Add more soil and keep packing it until mud gushes up when you press down. This will ensure that air pockets are filled with healthy soil.
- The best transplanting time is early spring (before the leaf buds open) or late fall (after deciduous leaves have fallen).

Maintenance

- To keep a tree upright, stake it if necessary, but gradually loosen the guy wires so the tree can develop its own strength.
- For the first few years, give your plants a good soaking during dry spells.
- Prune deciduous trees and shrubs right after planting to bring stem and limb areas in balance with the root area. Remove one-third of last year's growth, beginning with thin or weak branches. Do not prune the leader (the topmost growing point).
- Lightly trim coniferous trees planted in spring. Do not prune the leader, and do not trim at all if you plant in the fall.
- A layer of wood chips or other mulch material around the tree or shrub will prevent soil erosion and weed growth. Do not use material such as straw that encourages mice to nest or provides them with cover in winter. They will chew the bark from seedlings or saplings.
- Continue weed control until the tree is big enough to compete with weeds. Death of planted trees and shrubs due to competition from neighbouring vegetation is the most common cause of failure. Keep watch for this problem for at least two years.
- Protect your trees and shrubs from grazing animals or human damage by surrounding them with fencing.
- Mesh "socks" or covers can be placed over the leading shoots of young conifers to protect them from grazers.

- See "[Plant Project Maintenance Tips](#)" for further suggestions.