



Tree Planting & Mulching Guide for Volunteer Foresters

The source for this information and a more detailed guide on how to plant and care for trees see:

The USDA Forest Service's Tree Owners Manual
www.treeownersmanual.info

How to Properly Plant a Tree

Step 1: Find the Main Root System

Do NOT lift by the trunk - lift by the root ball or container

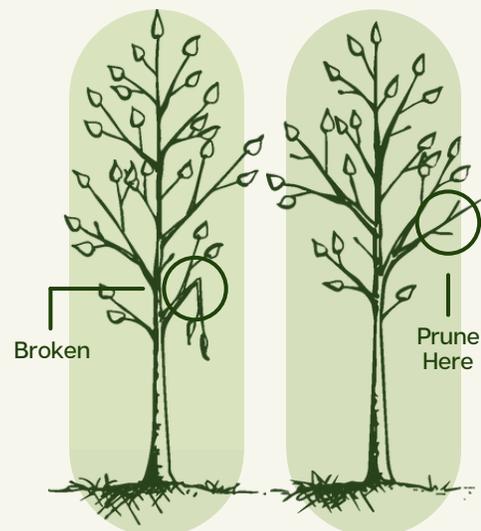
- For **balled-and-burlapped trees**: remove twine or wrappings from trunk, cut approx. $\frac{1}{3}$ of the wire basket and burlap, remove soil to expose the root flare
- For **container trees**: remove container and excess topsoil to expose root flare, cut any girdling or encircling roots



Step 2: Light Pruning

Only Prune:

- Broken or dead branches
- One of any competing central leaders
- Do not prune healthy branches at planting time



Step 3: Determine How Deep To Dig

- Measure the height of the remaining root ball. From the root flare's base to the root ball's bottom.
- The root flare must be at ground-level when the trees is planted.
- **This is a critical step!** This is exactly how deep you should dig the hole.



Step 4: Remove Problem Roots

- Cut roots growing above the main root system or those circling back toward the trunk



Step 5: Dig the Hole

- Depth: equal to height of the root ball
- Width: 2–3 times the width of the root ball (3x for hard clay soils)
- Do not dig deeper than the root ball height!



Step 6: Place the Tree

- Gently place the tree in the hole, keeping it upright and straight
- Do *not* disturb the root ball integrity



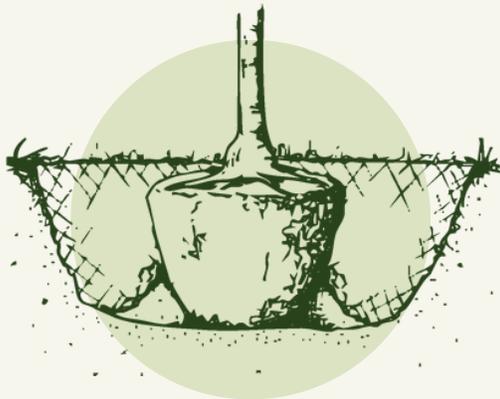
Step 8: Water

- Slowly apply 5 gallons of water to the root zone and backfilled area



Step 7: Backfill

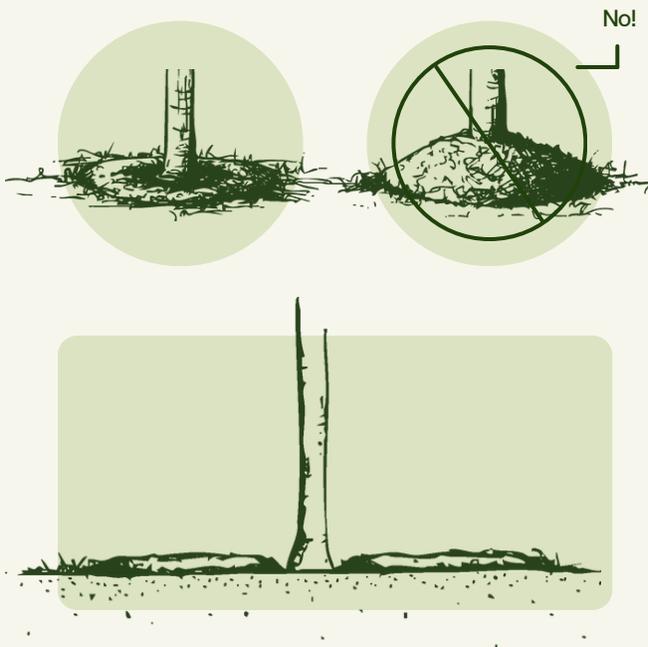
- Use the original soil to backfill
- Break up clumps, firm gently, and avoid packing the soil too tightly



How to Properly Mulch a Tree

Finally: Apply Mulch

- Use organic mulch (wood chips or shredded bark preferred)
- Maintain a 2–4 inch depth
- Keep mulch away from the trunk – never pile against the bark (“volcano mulching” suffocates roots and causes decay)
- Mulch ring should be as wide as possible, ideally to the dripline



Extra Tip

- If grass is present, lay down 5 pages of newspaper before adding mulch to suppress growth.
- Check mulch yearly and reapply as needed!

