

Planting a Tree

Trees are one of the most valuable aspects of a landscape and a crucial part of our ecosystem. From reducing energy costs by shading homes to providing habitat for insects, birds and mammals alike; trees matter! Trees can be planted in both the spring and the fall. Planting a tree properly is a vital step in making sure your new addition is around for years to come.

Planting a tree falls into a simple ten step plan that will give your tree the best start in its new home.

1. **Tree selection:** Diseases, pest, broken branches, winter burn, drought stress and death are just a few tree issues that can be avoided with proper tree selection. K-State's publication "Answers To...What Shall I Plant?" (available for free online or at the Shawnee County Extension Office) gives a comprehensive guide on tree selection. When selecting a tree from your nursery don't take home a damaged tree. The tree may be off balance due to poor pruning, have severely girdling roots, damaged bark or signs of pests, all red flags. Starting with a healthy tree will be your best chance to have a healthy tree for years to come. Pay attention to root ball size, for every inch of trunk diameter it should have 10-12 inches of rootball diameter.
2. **Transport and Storage:** Take care when transporting your new tree not to carry it by the trunk or to allow the root ball to dry out. If possible leave the tree in a shady location until you're ready to plant.
3. **No Strings Attached:** Make sure all tags, wires and strings are removed from the tree prior to planting. Anything left on the tree can girdle the trunk or branches.
4. **Dig a Good Hole:** Your tree should be placed in the bottom of a hole (same depth as the root ball) where it won't sink further down. The first level of primary roots should be placed at the soil surface, not beneath the soil. The width of the hole should be three times the diameter of the root ball. Tree roots grow primarily horizontally from the root ball.
5. **Set it Free:** Remove as much of the plastic pot, peat pot and burlap as possible. If there is small amount of girdling (circling) roots cut the bottom and sides of the root system.
6. **Fill the Hole:** Backfill the hole with the same soil that came out of it. Adding any amendments to the soil may do more harm than good. A tree hole filled with compost may fill with water as the composition is different than the remaining soil. If you do want to amend, till a much larger area (at least 10x10) where you want to plant the tree and blend as much original soil as possible. Soil amendments can be added in accordance with your soil test. The root flare of the tree should be visible above the soil. To ensure the root flare is visible you may have to remove some of soil the tree came with.
7. **Avoid Pruning:** Only remove branches that are damaged. Other branches (or their buds rather) are needed to send signals to the roots to grow.
8. **Water:** Make sure you water your tree thoroughly after planting. Then water once a week for the first year except during weeks of rain. For evergreens especially, continue to water through winter when the ground isn't frozen. Overwatering your tree can be just as damaging as neglecting it. Pay attention to the specific variety needs, weather and soil moisture.
9. **Mulch:** Mulch helps retain moisture, protect the roots from climate fluctuations and keep competing trees and plants away. Improperly mulching can do as much damage as no mulch at all! Mulch around the tree 2-4 inches deep (shallower near the tree getting deeper as you

go outwards) in a ring around the tree that spans 2-3 times wider than the root ball. Do not mulch directly up against the bark of the tree!

10. Staking: Only stake trees when necessary. Staking should immobilize the root ball not the trunk!