

Planting and Caring for Trees

*Planting a tree is a great investment in the future.
Planting it well and caring for it is even better!*

Once you have chosen a suitable species (see Green-Up fact sheet "Choosing the right tree") and a good location, follow these simple guidelines for proper tree planting and care.

Preparing the Planting Hole

Deep holes are not necessary when planting a tree. In fact, a deep hole (especially in clay soils) can trap water which may suffocate the roots. Dig a hole no deeper than the size of your tree's root ball. However, a wide hole helps the tree's feeder roots to spread out quickly and easily in search of food and water. If possible, make your planting hole 6 to 12" wider on all sides than the pot or root ball of the tree, to encourage the rapid growth of new feeder roots.

When digging a planting hole, make two piles of soil. Keep the dark topsoil separate from the lighter subsoil beneath. When you refill the hole, put the subsoil in first. Then mix the topsoil with leaf compost and use this to fill the top half of the hole.

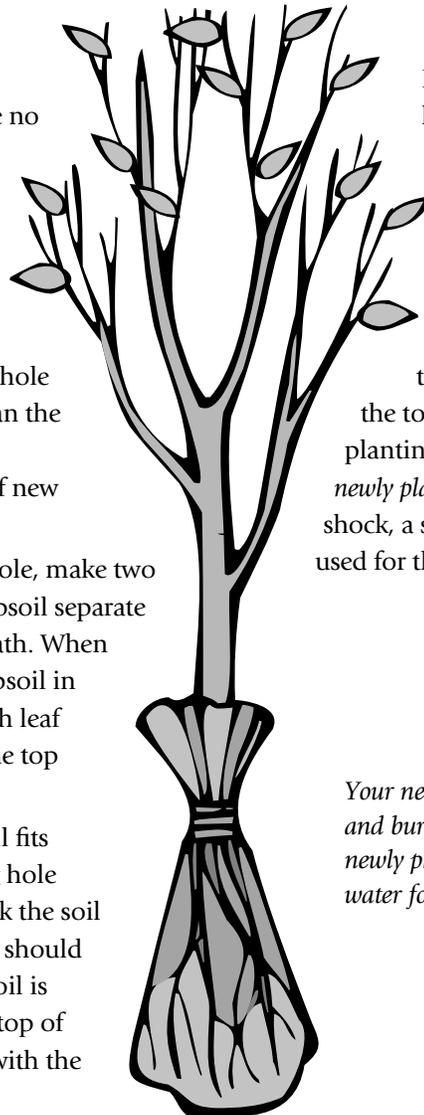
Make sure that the root ball fits comfortably into the planting hole without crowding. Firmly pack the soil as you refill the hole. The tree should stand straight, and once the soil is packed around the roots, the top of the root ball should be level with the ground.

When planting in heavy clay soil, it's a good idea to raise the tree a little higher than ground level, mounding extra soil up around the edges to meet the top of the root ball. This can prevent suffocation of tree roots from excess water in soils with slow drainage.

Fertilizers

Don't kill your tree with kindness! Fertilizers rich in nitrogen will encourage top growth which could spell doom for trees which need strong root systems first. Bone meal helps to stimulate healthy roots. Work one or two handfuls of bonemeal into the top layer of soil around the planting hole. *Don't use manure around newly planted trees!* To ease transplant shock, a solution of fish emulsion can be used for the first watering.

Your new tree might come in a pot, "balled and burlapped" or "bare root." In all cases, newly planted trees need plenty of extra water for the first year or two.



Water

Lack of water kills more newly planted trees than any other factor. When a tree is transplanted, 90% of its roots are usually left behind. These are the fine, hairlike roots that reach along the soil surface far beyond the trunk, soaking in water and nutrients.

Tree leaves constantly lose water as they breathe. Water loss is greatest during hot weather. With a crippled root system, it can be difficult for a tree to replace this water. This is why newly planted trees must be watered deeply and often.

Gently misting the leaves of a newly planted tree during hot, dry weather can also help it to replace moisture during its first season after transplanting.

It often takes a tree two years to rebuild its root system. Water twice a week in the first year; once a week the second year. A drip hose wrapped around the planting hole and left to drip for several hours, is a perfect way to water deeply. Of course, less watering will be necessary if there are frequent, steady rainfalls.

Support

If your tree is large or in a windy spot, staking will help it to grow straight until the roots are large enough to anchor it naturally. To prevent damage to the bark, tie the tree to a rigid stake using a flexible material. A short piece of garden hose threaded with wire is perfect.

Leave a little slack in the wire so the tree can sway gently in the wind. This gentle flexing helps to build strength in the trunk. *Remove all tree stakes after one year.*

Mulch

Many grasses survive by releasing chemicals from their roots which inhibit the growth of nearby trees. You can give your tree a boost by preventing grass growth around the trunk. Established trees can be mulched with several layers of newsprint covered with wood chips in a ring extending several feet from the trunk. This will gradually eliminate grass growth under the tree. For newly planted trees, do not replace sod after digging the planting hole. Instead, cover all exposed soil with a layer of wood chips about 5 cm deep. This will help to hold moisture, prevent weed growth and keep the roots cool. Trees which are mulched this way can grow up to twice as quickly without competition from grass!

Ongoing care

Keeping the roots healthy is the best insurance against pests and disease.

Avoid compacting the soil under the tree, since roots need to breathe. Encourage earthworms by top dressing with compost. In the fall, run your lawnmower over any fallen leaves to help them decompose and enrich the soil under your tree.

Trees can benefit from light applications of balanced organic fertilizers in the spring in the years following planting. Remember that the roots extend out much farther than the branches!

With basic care and a little luck, your tree will thrive, providing health, comfort and beauty for many years to come.

Leaf Compost and Wood Chips

Leaf compost and wood chips are available at the Peterborough Ecology Park on Ashburnham Drive, or delivered in bulk from the City of Peterborough's Waste Reduction Division at 742-7777 ext. 1657.

