



## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** ★★ ★

# Project: Plant Trees in Your Neighborhood

Trees do so much for us. They turn an ordinary city street into a pleasant strolling ground, providing shade, color, and texture. Trees also soak up carbon dioxide and stabilize soil, which helps to clean up the air we breathe and guard against flooding. There are five key steps to complete a tree-planting project.

- 1) The first step is to determine a location and decide what types of trees you wish to plant. Certain kinds of trees do well in limited quarters, while others have extensive root systems that grow rapidly and require space to spread.
  - Schoolyards, churches, community centers, and parks are excellent choices for placing a cluster of trees. Be sure, however, to get permission with the owners or managers of the space and involve members of that organization in your efforts. You'll need to secure the site, either renting it from the owner or establishing a written agreement for its use.
  - If, on the other hand, you are planning to plant trees next to a street, you will need to get permission from your municipal government. In many places, this typically would come from the department of planning and community development, public works, or transportation.
- 2) A successful group efforts require a motivated team whose members agree upon clearly defined tasks, set reachable goals, and act with inspiration and purpose.
  - Start off planning with folks you know, and ask them to tell others to join your efforts.
  - Meet regularly, especially as MLK Day approaches, and solicit input from everyone.
  - Assign concrete tasks to keep everyone motivated and on track. There are ways to include all ages in this work; the youngest volunteers can dig, carry light objects, or serve refreshments to the adults hard at work.
  - Talk about the parallels and differences between your effort to nurture trees and community connections and those of Martin Luther King Jr.
  - Research the needs of the trees you intend to plant. How much sunlight and water do they require? How large can they get, and how much room do the roots require? This is an excellent task for your younger volunteers to do and report back to the larger group.
  - Decide what kind of trees you would like based on your research into what grows well in your area and space constraints.
  - Think ahead! Trees require continuous care especially early on. Who will water the young trees? Check they haven't been vandalized and take protective measures? Prune them if they get close to cables or sidewalk? Handle pests that can infect bark, leaves, and roots?
  - Determine what kinds of supplies you will need and how you will obtain them. Typical supplies include soil, compost, tools, and protective barriers. Many local organizations give trees away; check [here](#) for links to local organizations.
  - Solicit funds from team members and/or others as well as in-kind donations from business for the supplies you'll need.
  - Purchase the supplies before the service day so they're ready to go on MLK Day.



# MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

- Set goals for yourselves, such as number of trees planted, survival rate, and number of volunteers planting.
- Record these goals, and make sure you can meet them. If needed, revise the goals in a way that the whole team can agree on.
- [Post your project](#) on our site so that people in your area can join your efforts

### 3) Preparing and implementing your activity:

- Before planting day, you'll need to spend at least one day clearing out the site(s). Many hands make lighter work, but consider also renting a machine like a backhoe for this task if you plan to plant all the trees in one spot.
- Make sure project leaders or coordinators are at the site early, ready to greet team members as they arrive.
- Provide clear instructions and constructive corrections, if needed, as the service takes place.
- Set up your supplies in an orderly fashion, accessible to all.
- Organize volunteers into different work crews. Have some prepare planting areas, create protective barriers and supports, dig holes.
- PLANT! Be sure to follow the guidelines for each kind of tree you're putting in the ground in terms of distance apart, sun exposure, and watering needs.

### 4) After the project is completed, take some time to assess and reflect on it. Think about what went well and what could be improved.

- Host an official debriefing meeting for team members after the service day.
- Examine the goals you set for yourselves and consider which you met, exceeded, and didn't quite reach.
- Who did your work impact? What did you accomplish? How did it feel?
- Ask everyone for their honest assessment of what went well and how to improve for next time.
- Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to you

### 5) We know you might not like to brag, but please do! You may inspire others to organize a fitness event once they hear what you accomplished. [Share your service story](#). We're listening and want to know what you did and how you feel about it.