

# Fact Sheet



## How on Earth Do You Select a Tree?



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Natural Resources  
Conservation  
Service

February 2003

---

- Landscape*** Choose a tree that is suited to the landscape plan. When fully grown, the tree should fit the space allowed. Is the tree being planted next to a building, under power lines, etc.?
- Soils*** Select a tree that is adapted to the planting site. Is the soil acid or alkaline? How well does the soil drain? Make sure the tree is suited to your climate. Is the tree resistant to known pests in your area?
- Site*** Consider your needs when planting a tree. Will the tree enhance the heating or cooling of your home?
- Ornamental Features*** Will the tree add to the beauty of your landscape? Consider features such as branching, color and texture of leaves and bark, fruit, and flowers.
- Healthy Trees*** At the nursery, select a tree with a good root ball. Do not buy trees with wounds or scars on the trunk. Look for a tree with a "healthy" appearance.

### ***How on Earth Do I Care For My Trees?***

- Water*** A newly planted tree may require watering about twice a week until it becomes acclimated to the site. Watering will depend on rainfall. Too much water can do as much damage as not enough water.
- Mulch*** Maintain a three to four inch mulch layer for the first three years. Use bark, woodchips, compost, or pine needles. Mulch will retain moisture, control weeds, keep soil temperature constant, and improve appearance of the tree. Do not use fresh grass clippings or pile the material around the base of the tree.
- Staking*** Staking a tree should only be done to hold a tree in an upright position and assure that roots are in contact with the soil. Normally, staking is not required. If you stake your tree, remove the stake as soon as possible to allow proper trunk development.
- Protection*** Avoid injury to your tree with lawnmowers and string trimmers. Prune only dead or diseased branches or to raise the height of the lower branches.
-

---

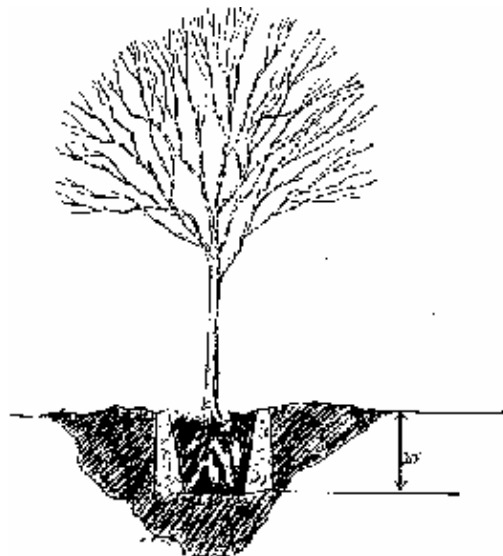
## ***How On Earth Do You Plant a Tree?***

1. For containerized trees, **do not** remove the tree from container until ready to plant. Exposure to air dries and damages hair roots.

For balled and burlapped trees, leave the burlap intact, but cut all twine or ties. Cut and remove all wire baskets.

2. Measure from the soil line of the container to the bottom of the container, or the depth of the burlap ball. (See illustration below.) This is the depth of the planting hole. **Do not** dig the hole deeper or loosen the soil in the bottom of the hole.
3. Select a planting site with good drainage. Dig the planting hole the approximate size of the root ball. Loosen the surrounding soil at least 12 inches deep and 2 times the diameter of the root ball.
4. Gently place the tree in the hole. Lift the tree by the trunk and root ball. Check the vertical position of the tree and backfill with the removed soil. Break up large clods to eliminate air pockets.
5. Water with a slow stream to settle the soil and remove air pockets. Be sure to level the soil to the existing ground line.
6. Mulch with three to four inches of bark, compost, pine needles, or woodchips. **Do not** mulch with fresh grass clippings. Under normal situations staking is not needed or desirable.

***For best success, plant trees in January or February.***



---

***Conservation Across America***

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov)

---

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.