



Tree planting guide

Before planting your tree

Choosing the right tree for the right place is an important decision. When planting a tree, there are a number of things to consider, such as:

- ◆ **How big will the tree grow and can you provide the room it needs to grow?** Remember to check the mature height and spread (width) of the tree to make sure it will fit in the area you have chosen, or you may be making a problem for yourself (or others) in the future! Remember distances away from buildings, pavements and driveways—if the nursery label says ‘dwarf’, do some research to see if it really is.
- ◆ **Do you want your tree to provide shade in summer?** A deciduous tree (one that loses its leaves in autumn) will create shade in summer, but will let light into your house during winter. An evergreen tree will shade your house all year round.
- ◆ **What type of soil is in your garden—clay, loam or sand?** A quick way to check your soil type is to hold a small amount of soil in your hand and add a little water to just moisten the soil. Rub together and try to roll the moist soil into a log shape. If the log sticks together, then you have more clay in your soil. If it partially sticks, but is still crumbly, you have more loam. If it will not form into a log shape, and has large grains in it, it is mostly sand. The soil type affects watering and drainage. Heavy clay soils can slow drainage, causing waterlogging, while water can drain quickly through sandy soils. Adding organic matter such as compost to sandy soils will help hold moisture in the soil and provide nutrients for the tree. You may also want to check your soil pH as this will also affect the growth of your plant.
- ◆ **What is your local climate like?** How much rain do you get during the year? What is the average temperature in each season and how windy is your

garden? What is the most desirable location? Is the planting site in full sun, semi shade or full shade?

You may need to give your plant extra water in dry months and protect your tree from the hot sun or from strong winds while it is establishing.

Purchasing your tree

Trees sold in containers or pots, bags or wrapped in hessian can be planted any time of the year. Bare rooted trees should be only planted in early spring while the tree and its roots are dormant.

Select healthy stock from a reputable nursery. Where possible check the root system to make sure the plant is not pot bound.

Purchase your tree close to the time of planting.

How to plant your tree

Preparing the hole

You will need to dig a bowl-shaped hole at least two to three times wider than the plant’s root ball or the container the tree came in.

Keep the sides of the hole rough and loosen the soil at the base of the hole. This helps the roots spread easily into the surrounding soil.

Keep the base of the hole firm and ‘measure’ the plant in the hole (see Figure 1).

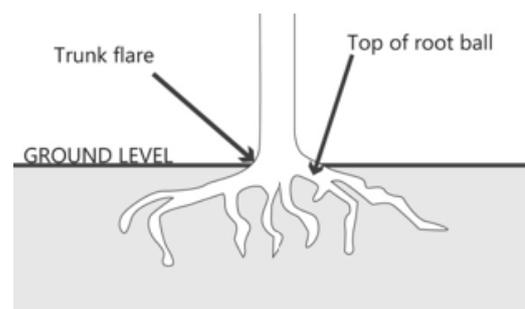


Figure 1

Aim to have the trunk flare—where the roots spread out from the trunk—at the finished height of the hole, or just above it. If the trunk flare is not visible, you might have to carefully remove excess soil from the top of the root ball to expose the trunk flare.

Carefully remove the container from around the root ball. Lift the tree by the root ball and place it in the hole. Lightly tease any roots circling outside the root ball. Make sure the plant is straight before you start back-filling the hole.

Remember, trees planted too deep will grow slowly and develop poorly due to a lack of air reaching the roots. There is also an increased potential for pest and disease problems (e.g. trunk rot).

Back-filling the planting hole

While holding the tree in place, half-fill the hole with the excavated soil, repacking the soil firmly without compacting. If your soil is very sandy, mix in some compost to increase water retention. As the tree's roots spread out from the original hole, amending the back-fill soil will not solve the problems facing the tree if the soil is poor. Add water to the partially-filled hole and let it soak in, then add more soil until you reach the trunk flare, then water it in again. A raised soil mound may be formed away from the trunk using the excess soil from the planting hole. This will create a 'moat' that will allow water to soak into the soil (see Figure 2). Fertiliser is not required at planting.

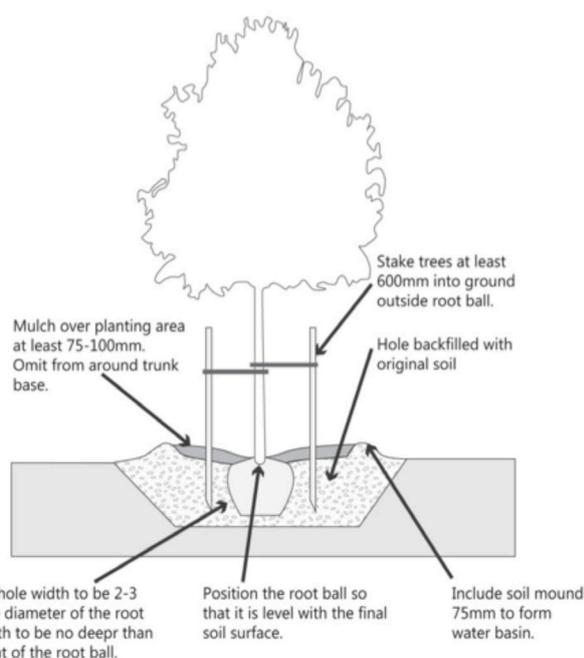


Figure 2

Staking your tree

When a tree flexes in the wind the trunk strengthens as it grows. While staking should not be required and is not recommended, there may be situations where you may decide to stake a new tree. If staking is required, make sure the tree is tied loosely so the trunk can still flex (see Figure 2). The two stakes and support cables should be removed after a year of growth.

Keeping the moisture in

Mulch on the soil surface helps to keep soil moisture in, moderates temperatures by cooling the soil in summer and retaining warmth in winter, and reduces weed competition. It is recommended that mature organic mulch is spread to a thickness of 75–100 mm to cover an area double the width of the tree's root ball. Where possible, make sure that no mulch is in direct contact with the tree's trunk (see Figure 3). Materials that may be used for mulch include leaf litter, bark chips, straw and stones.

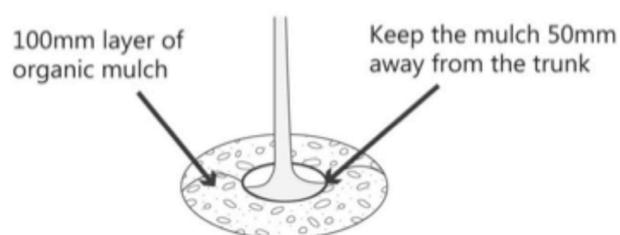


Figure 3

Watering your tree

Keep newly planted trees well watered for at least one to two years after planting. A transplanted tree has a small root system, so it is important that you water it at least once a week, taking any rainfall into account and being careful not to over-water. Watering less frequently but deeply is best. Maintaining adequate moisture is essential for survival and for developing a healthy tree. Check the soil a couple of times a week in summer to see if more water is needed. The soil should be moist, but not soaking wet, down to a depth of 200 mm.

Pruning your tree

The tree should not be pruned when planted except to remove broken or rubbing branches.

Wait for at least one year after planting before doing any pruning.

Further information

Contact members of the National Urban Forest Alliance by visiting www.nufa.com.au for more details.