

Planting Trees in Containers – Steps for Success

Plant the tree as soon as possible. Keep your tree safe and watered until planted.

Excellent Video: Keep Indianapolis Beautiful Shows You How to Properly Plant a Tree

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RypqSrLZVlw&ab_channel=KeepIndianapolisBeautiful

To Plant:

1. Get about 5 gallons of water ready.
2. Remove the sod in a 3 to 4-foot circle. KEEP the sod. A proper hole will resemble a shallow saucer (other side, #4.) The hole must be 2x wider than the tree pot; 3x is even better. The hole should only be as deep as needed so that the bottom of the hole is solid. *You will determine this after the following steps.*
3. Take the tree out of the pot. Remove the support pole.
4. With your hands, a trowel or hand saw, probe and remove the top layer of the potting medium until you uncover the main order roots, aka the 'root flare'. This area will just meet the final soil level when planted properly. *Cut away small roots above the main order roots.*
5. Now loosen/cut the roots on the sides and bottom of the root ball.
 - A. Use a *utility knife* to cut vertical lines every 2-3 inches around the whole outside edge and bottom. Keep loosening the root edge with hands/trowel/handsaw until you are sure there are no encircling roots.
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 - B. Using a *handsaw*, cut off the outer 1-inch of massed roots around the whole outside edge and bottom. Keep loosening the root edge with hands/trowel/handsaw until you are sure there are no encircling roots.
6. Prune ANY roots at the point they begin to circle within the root ball or along the edges. If they are small and supple, you may straighten them in the hole and keep them straight with soil.
7. Measure the new depth of the root ball from the now-exposed root flare to the bottom of the root ball. Dig your hole 1-inch shallower. (Lay a straight stick or tool handle over the hole as a guide in taking measurements).
8. Put the prepared root ball into the hole on the firm bottom and make sure the tree is straight. Make sure the root flare area is about 1-inch above the grade.
9. Back fill with about half the soil and work it into empty crevices. Tamp down gently and firmly with your hands. You may add half the water and allow it to soak in.
10. Add the remaining soil, gently firming it, so that the soil just meets the root flare.
11. Turn the sod pieces upside down and arrange them around the edges of the removal area so that you have a raised, encircled edge to hold water.
12. Apply wood chip mulch to the area. The rule is 3-3-3: 3 feet wide, 3 inches thick, 3 inches away from the trunk. Imagine that the tree is resting in the center of a classic doughnut. Never pile mulch up against the trunk of any tree. Never use rocks or plastic around a tree.
13. Water with the remaining water, gently, over the wood chips.
14. Water the tree at least weekly with about 5 gallons of water. More or less depending on the site, soil and weather. Any original potting medium below ground will dry out before the soil.

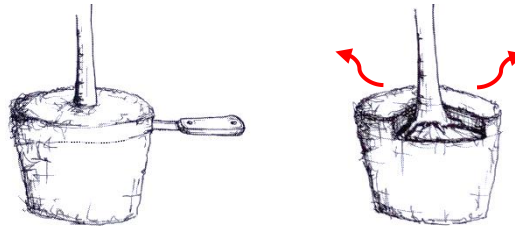
Staking is not recommended. The young tree needs to move in the wind to develop strong roots.

Fertilizer is not recommended.

“Once you have purchased containerized trees and shrubs, be prepared to cut and manipulate roots before you plant it. According to research, it is best to sever roots with a sharp utility knife, handsaw, or a sharp spade. Don’t worry; it won’t hurt the plant. A containerized plant has 100% of its root system whereas, bareroot or balled-and-burlapped plants leave behind lots of roots when dug at the nursery. Studies show the roots that are cut regenerate quickly and grow into the landscape soil, helping the plant get established and survive dry spells.”

-Penn State Extension. *Container Grown Trees and Shrubs – Fix those roots before you plant.*
 Vincent Cotrone, *Extension Urban Forester, Northeast Region.*

1. Remove the pot. Excavate the top of the root ball. Expose the root flare.



2. Remove girdling/circling roots from all areas of the rootball at the point they turn.

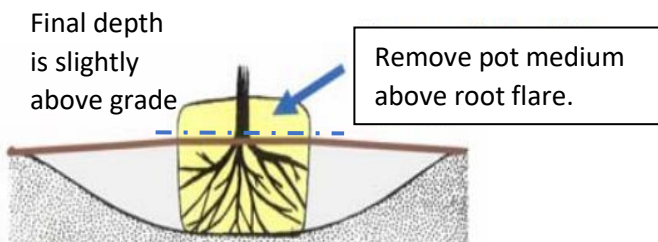


3. Remove the buildup of outer and circling roots from sides and bottom. Disentangle or cut away.



Circling and diving roots later become stem-girdling roots creating an unstable, unhealthy tree.

4. Plant in a hole that is 3x wider than the pot at a depth that will set the root flare 1-2” above grade.



Adjust the depth of the planting hole to bring the root flare to the correct depth. Backfill.



Gently shave the off the roots on all four sides and the bottom of the soil/root system.

5. Mulch 3 ft wide, 3” thick, keeping it 3” away from the trunk. Keep the tree watered but not wet.

1. Tree Owners Manual. USDA Forest Service July 2010
2. Screen grab, Keep Indianapolis Beautiful Shows You How to Properly Plant a Tree. See page 1.
3. Tree Installation: Process and Practice
<https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/fnr/fnr-433-w.pdf>
4. CMG GardenNotes #636 Tree Planting Steps
https://static.colostate.edu/client-files/csfs/pdfs/TreePlanting_636.pdf