

Fairfax Tree Stewards: How to Plant a Containerized Tree

Remove tags, trunk wrap, string, ribbons, and wires from the tree.

Remove tree from container. Handle the plant by lifting the container rather than the tree trunk. To remove the plant from the container, turn the pot on its side and gently tap the container until the root system slides out. If the root ball does not move, cut the pot away from the tree.

Identify trunk flare, and if necessary, remove excess soil. Trunk flare where the trunk begins to spread out as it meets the roots growing underground. If you cannot see a flare, remove soil around the trunk of the tree until you see the area where the first main roots attach to the trunk. Not all trees have a bulge at trunk flare.

Dig a BIG hole. **To determine depth of the hole:** measure distance from trunk flare to bottom of the root ball. **To determine the width of the hole:** measure the width of the root ball and multiply by 2-3. It is helpful to use small stakes to mark the edges of the circle. **Make sloping sides on the hole.**

Make a pedestal at the bottom of the hole. This is a small ridge for the tree to sit on that is slightly higher than the bottom of the hole. You will drape the roots over the ridge.

Break up or “tease out” the roots to encourage integration into the existing soil. Do this on all parts of the root-ball – top, sides and bottom. If roots are not pruned or teased out, they may continue to grow in a circular manner that may cause girdling of the tree and eventually lead to decline or death.

Put the tree in the hole. Make sure that the trunk is straight. Plant the bottom of the trunk flare 1-2 inches above grade to allow for settling.

Backfill hole with existing soil. Water. Fill the hole about halfway up with the existing soil. Water the root system. Let the water soak down into the soil. Finish filling the hole and water again.

Edge a tree ring around the tree. Widen the circle around the tree to protect from mower damage.

Mulch the tree with no more than 2-3 inches of hardwood mulch. Keep the mulch 4-5 inches away from the trunk of the tree.

Install Deer Protection with 4 stakes around the tree circle, fishing line tied at 3 levels around the stakes, and high viz orange ribbon tied to the lines. Also use trunk protector.

DO NOT USE AMENDMENTS. The tree roots will integrate into the existing soil better without amendments.

DO NOT FERTILIZE. The tree has sufficient fertilizer and does not need more.

DO NOT STAKE TREE, unless the tree is in a windy spot or if the leader is weak. The tree will become stronger when allowed to grow without staking.