



How to Start Growing your Family Tree

Preparing the Ground

So you've decided to start working on your Family Tree – now what? There are a few steps you should take to prepare the ground for growing your tree.

I started researching my Family Tree over 30 years ago (before all the information was so readily available on the Internet) and have made lots of mistakes over the years. I had duplicate people in my tree, duplicate information in my files and very wrong information that I had taken from others' online trees thinking they fit mine. What a mess! After starting the Certificate in Genealogical Studies program through the National Institute for Genealogical Studies I decided to take a step back, organize my documents and information and start from the beginning, making sure all the people I had gathered were in fact family!

Firstly, gather all the information you already have. You probably have more than you realize. If you're starting your tree with your parents, chances are you know their birth date and approximate year. Write down this information on a Family Group Sheet ([click here for a downloadable copy](#)). Fill in as much of the information on the sheet as you can.

If you know your Grandparents information, start a new sheet for them, even if it is only their names and places of birth.

Secondly, decide what branch of the family you are going to start with. When you first start, its tempting to jump around between the different branches, but believe me, it's best to start with one then work your way through.

What to think about:

1. Paternal or Maternal

Do you want to start with your Mother or Fathers side of the family?

2. Which Branch

Once decided, do you follow your grandfathers line or grandmothers line?

Now, you need decide **how you are going to store your information**. As you can see there are LOTS of decisions to be made at the beginning! You can do it electronically or print and file the forms in binders or as I do, both.



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One important point here though; Figure out your filing system before you go much further. It will make your life an awful lot easier if you do (and I know this from experience!). If you are going with electronic filing, create a filing structure that not only makes sense to you but to anyone you may pass the information on to. Here's an example of how I have set mine up:

You may not want to go so granular however think forward to when you have much, much more information.

The other important thing to remember is to be consistent in your naming of documents and folders. Again, I found out the hard way of having to troll through hundreds of documents to find what I was looking for. Since I rearranged all my online information, I find information so much faster.

Once you have the admin work done, you can start your research in earnest. Something you are going to hear about from me often is **PROOF, PROOF, PROOF!!** Please do **NOT** accept information you find on any of the online Family Tree apps as true for *your* family. A lot of people find information and copy it to their own without finding out if it is really relevant to their tree. You can certainly use the information as a starting point but do your own follow up research. Unless you have seen a copy of a Birth, Death or Marriage certificate you can't be sure you have the right person. If you ever read professional genealogy articles you will see reference to **Evidence** and **Proof** consistently. It's like doing a jigsaw puzzle, sometimes you think a piece fits until you look at the big picture.

Another term you will hear often in Genealogy is **Citing**, but more on that later – I don't want to overwhelm you with terminology!

