



## Tree Planting

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There is a lot more to growing a high quality tree than digging a hole. Trees are a valuable asset to a neighborhood, home, farmstead or business. Growing such a tree does begin with the hole, however. It is often said that it is better to plant a fifty dollar tree in a hundred dollar hole than to plant a hundred dollar tree in a fifty dollar hole.

First find the trunk flare of the tree. The trunk flare is just above the area where the roots are growing and can usually be easily recognized by the swelling or flared appearance of the trunk. Some times when planting a balled and burlapped tree you may have to dig around to top of the ball to find the flare. Soil may have been pulled up around the trunk during the digging and burlapping process. For a container grown tree the flare should be at the surface of the soil in the container.

Dig the hole no deeper than the distance from the trunk flare to the bottom of the root ball or container. In extremely hard soil you may want to loosen the soil below this depth but do not make the hole deeper. The hole should be dug at least three times wider than the root ball or container. This allows for good flow of air in the soil and provides uncompacted soil for the roots to begin growing outward. The most common mistake in planting trees is to dig the hole too deep and too narrow. It is actually better to plant the tree slightly too shallow than to plant it too deep. If the tree is to be planted in heavily compacted soil such as around a new home where lots of construction equipment has been used, spade or loosen the soil even more that three times the width of the root ball or container.

Carefully place the tree in the center of the hole and backfill with natural soil. Continuously add water as you are backfilling. Remove as much of the twine, wire caging and burlap as possible. Leave a slight basin when backfilling to collect rain water which will soak down to the roots. Do not add soil amendments unless the soil is very poor. The reason for this is because the roots need to grow outward into the natural soil and adding amendments such as peat moss creates a condition that the roots like and they might begin to grow in circles within the hole area rather than into the natural soil. Circling roots can strangle and kill trees. Do not pack the soil tightly - only enough to insure that air pockets are removed and that the tree will not shift. Over packing will prevent water from reaching the roots and prevent the roots from growing outward from the root ball.

Finally add a two inch layer of organic mulch out to the tree drip line. Keep the mulch three or four inches away from the trunk to control insect and rodent damage. Only stake the tree if it is in a windy area. Trees will develop stronger trunks and establish themselves quicker if they are not staked. If you find you must stake the tree be sure that the tree can sway a little in the wind to build strength. Remove the staking device after one growing season.

Watering is necessary only if normal rainfall is less than one inch per week. Supplemental watering is a good



idea every 7 to 10 days if the weather is very hot and dry. If you don't know if a tree needs watering, a good way to check is to dig a hole 6 inches deep a few feet away from the tree. If the soil is dry and powdery, the area six or eight feet around the tree needs a good soaking. Regular deep soakings are much more effective than squirting a little water at the tree every day.

Additional information on basic tree care can be found at [www.plantamillion.org](http://www.plantamillion.org). Plant A Million is a project of Hoosier Heartland Resource Conservation and Development Council and 10 Soil and Water Conservation Districts in central Indiana. Plant A Million has two basic goals. The first goal is to help people in central Indiana plant a million or more mostly native trees over the next 6 to 10 years. The second is to provide information that will help our citizens take good care of the trees they plant or those that already exist in the ten county area.

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