

# Best Way to Plant a Tree

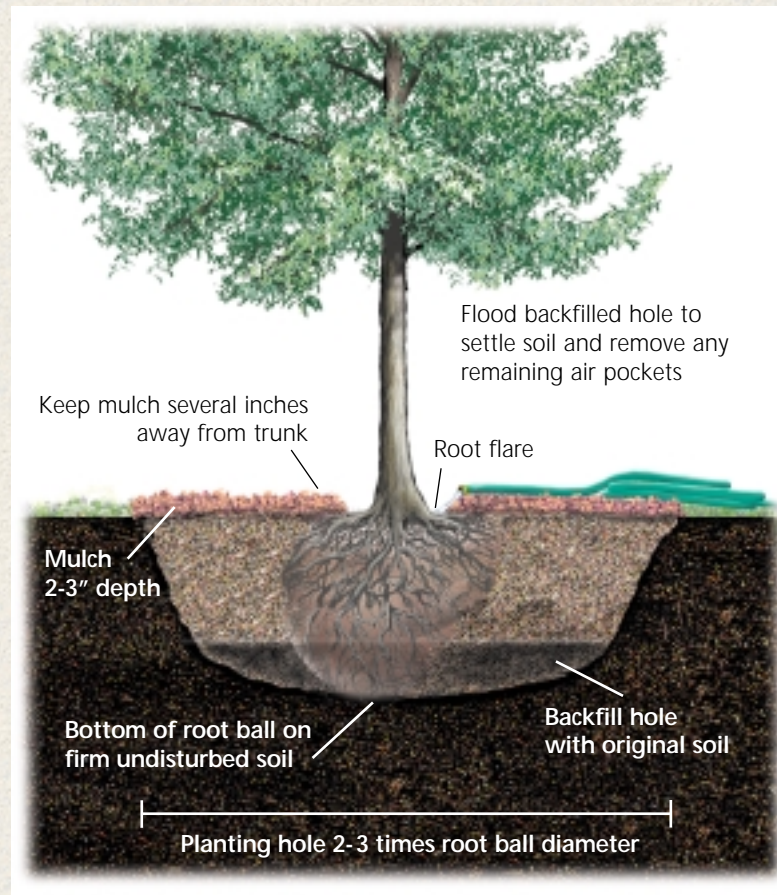
**1. Call JULIE before you dig!** Illinois law requires calling for underground utility locations at least two working days before digging. The number is 800-892-0123 and the service is free. Residents within the city limits of Chicago must call DIGGER at 312-744-7000.

**2. Dig a hole that is at least 2 times wider than the root ball (3 times wider in compacted soil).** For depth of hole, you will need to vertically measure a firm root ball. If it is not solid and moist, water root ball and let sit overnight. Next, measure from bottom of root ball to root flare (the point where the top-most root in the root ball originates from the trunk). You may need to scrape off excess soil to expose the root flare. The depth of the hole should be equal to or slightly less than this distance. The bottom of the root ball should sit on undisturbed soil. The top-most structural root should be 1 - 3 inches below the soil surface when measured at 4 inches from trunk. It is better to plant trees up to 3 inches shallow rather than too deep, especially in poorly-draining clay soils.

**3. Carefully roll or lift tree into planting hole.** Small container trees can be carefully removed from container and placed into hole. Circling roots, if present, should be straightened or trimmed. Balled and burlap trees should be left intact. Broken or damaged roots frequently result in the loss of newly-planted trees, so always lift trees by the root mass and never by the trunk. If tree is too heavy to lift, dig a ramp into planting hole and slowly roll it in.

**4. Straighten and secure tree.** Look at tree from two different angles, carefully adjusting tree so trunk is true vertical. Check both angles of view a second time, then secure tree by compacting soil with foot pressure around bottom third of root ball.

**5. Cut away all burlap and twine above the bottom third of the root ball.** If wire basket exists, cut top one or two rings of wire off and remove from hole. Never leave burlap, twine or wire material in hole, as these will create air gaps.



**6. Break up soil into small pebble-sized particles. Fill remainder of hole, lightly tamping every 4 to 6 inches.** Amend backfill with 25% compost if soil has high clay content. Do not over compact the backfill, as soil needs to remain loose enough for good root development.

**7. Settle backfill by thoroughly watering tree immediately after planting to settle soil.** Be attentive, as the first watering is the time a tree may lean to one side, especially if root ball was loose or sandy. If that happens, tenderly pull tree back to straight position. Add more soil if settling occurs.

**8. Stake tree only when necessary.** Staking is not recommended except in situations where the tree will not be able to stand on its own, such as in sandy soils or windy locations. If staking is used, make sure ties around tree are rubber cords/tubing or flat straps to avoid girdling as the tree grows. *Wire and garden hose combinations are not good.* Do not stake so tightly as to restrict trunk movement. All staking should be removed after one year so tree can naturally strengthen with wind movement.

**9. Create a 2-inch to 3-inch thick mulch bed** so the root ball has good air exchange and water access. Mulch an area around the base of the tree equal to 3 feet per inch of trunk diameter (2" tree = 6 foot diameter mulch area). If space is restricted, mulch as large an area as possible to limit turf and weed competition and retain moisture. Properly mulched trees can grow up to three times as fast as trees that have turf, flowers or weeds within the recommended mulch area. Don't overdo the amount of mulch; too much can suffocate a tree.

**10. Inspect and water your new tree.** It is important to keep the root ball moist but not saturated with light, frequent watering for the first two years of establishment.