



Monarch Research Planting Forward

Tree Planting and Care Tips

STEP ONE: Select a Location for Your Tree

- ❑ **Look up!** Do not plant under power lines
- ❑ **See your tree as it will be:** Plant your tree away from buildings and power lines to allow for the tree's eventual height and the width of its crown (its "spread").
- ❑ **Create your own microclimate:** plant deciduous trees (those that lose their leaves in the winter) on the southeast, southwest, and west of your house to cool your house with shade in the summer. Plant evergreens north of your house to block winter winds.
- ❑ **Know what's below:** Avoid planting too close to buried gas, electric, water and sewer lines. Request a free utility locate service by calling [Iowa One Call](#) (Dial 811) at least 48 hours before you dig (not including holidays/weekends).

STEP TWO: Dig the Hole

- ❑ **Dig a hole 3 or 4 times wider** than the container the tree is in and only as deep as the container.
- ❑ **Angle the sides of the hole slightly and tamp down the soil at the bottom of the hole** to create a firm base.

STEP THREE: Plant

- ❑ **Tip the container of the tree on its side** and tap the sides to loosen the soil from the pot.
- ❑ **Gently slide the tree out of the container**, being careful to keep the soil around the roots. Lift the tree by the root ball (the soil in the container) and NOT the trunk.
- ❑ **Check for circling roots** (roots that wrap around the root ball) – If you see circling roots, use a utility knife to make an "X" on the bottom of the root ball and 4 lateral cuts up the side of the root ball. The cuts may go up to an inch into the root ball in order to sever the circling roots.
- ❑ **Stand the tree upright and look for where the trunk flares out slightly toward its base.** This is known as the root flare. You may have to gently remove some of the soil to find it.
- ❑ **Place the tree in the hole** and make sure the bottom of the root flare is ground level.
- ❑ **Backfill the hole** with the soil you removed. Be sure not to put sod (grass) back into the hole. Instead, put the clumps of sod grass-side down around the edge of the area you excavated to create a basin round the tree.

STEP FOUR: Water

- ❑ **Water the root ball** and the area you back filled with soil.
- ❑ **Let it rain!** If it does not rain an inch a week, provide 5-10 gallons of water (depending how much rain you receive that week).
- ❑ **One good soak a week** when you water is better than watering every day.

(Over)

- **Err on the side of less water** rather than risk watering too much.
- **Keep watering your tree**
 - **until the ground freezes** in the winter, and
 - **for the first couple of years**, maybe even Years 3 and 4 if there is a drought.

STEP FIVE: Mulch

- **Spread mulch** 2 to 4 inches deep in a 3-foot diameter around the tree. Wood chips or other natural materials are ideal.
- **No mulch volcanoes!** Keep the mulch away from the trunk of the tree.
- **Replenish mulch** as the tree grows. Mulch provides many benefits, including keeping the soil around the roots cool, helping the soil retain moisture in dry weather, and keeping weed whackers and lawn mowers from damaging the trunk.

STEP SIX: Prune

- **At the time of planting**, prune any broken or dead branches or any that are crossed and rubbing each other. This is also a good time to make sure there is only one central leader (the vertical stem at the top of the tree).
- **Do not prune too much!** Your newly planted tree needs as many leaves as possible to help it grow strong.
- **Start pruning for strength and/or form beginning in Year 3 or 4.** More info on how to prune [here](#).

Want More Info or to watch some videos?

- Find more information about how to plant a tree in [this handout](#) from The Arbor Day Foundation.
- Videos of **how to plant** a tree can be found here:
 - ISU Extension and Outreach – [“How to Plant a Container-Grown Tree”](#)
 - Arbor Day Foundation – [“Planting Containerized Trees”](#)
- Videos about **how to prune** trees can be found here:
 - Morton Arboretum – [“Pruning Trees”](#)
- Find out **how to protect your trees from deer, rabbit or rodents** here:
 - ISU Extension and Outreach – [“Prevent Wildlife Damage to Trees and Shrubs”](#)

Helpful Tips:

- **The top reasons trees fail to thrive:**
 - planted too deep
 - circling roots that eventually “strangle” the tree (this is referred to as “girdling roots”)
 - mechanical damage from lawn mowers and weed whips
- **Do NOT fertilize your newly planted tree.** Fertilizers can shock the tree. Do a soil test before fertilizing after the first couple of years.