



A leafy tree canopy contributes so much to the well-being of people who live nearby. Trees improve air quality, moderate high temperatures, reduce stormwater run-off, provide food and shelter to wildlife, increase the value of homes, and much more. **Planting trees is one of the easiest and most lasting ways you can help make neighborhoods and the environment healthier.**

If you live in an urban area, choose street trees that can thrive in narrow spaces and endure the exhaust fumes from passing traffic. Good options for street trees are native species such as small Common Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), medium-height Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), and towering White Oak (*Quercus alba*). Those varieties also work well as yard trees, but you have many other options where there is more room to plant. **A few natives to consider:** Paperbark Maple (*Acer griseum*) stays under 30 feet tall, while American Hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) tops out at about 40 feet tall. Willow oak (*Quercus phellos*) is a big, beautiful tree that can reach more than 60 feet tall and stand for generations. For more ideas, visit the **Arbor Day Foundation** (arborday.org), which has a free, handy guide to choosing a tree that includes more than 200 selections.

Nurseries offer trees in several different formats, including bare-root and balled-and-burlapped specimens, but container-grown trees are the most commonly available and the easiest to plant and get established swiftly.

HOW TO PLANT TREES

Take the time to plant trees properly and they will grow up strong and sturdy. Here's the strategy recommended by the experts in the PHS Trees program.

Handle with Care

Never carry a container-grown tree by the trunk or the branches, which could snap under the weight of the soil ball at the base. **Remove all tags and twine** before planting and prune off any dead or broken branches. To remove the tree from the container, hold the edge of the pot and gently pull from the base of the trunk. If it doesn't lift out easily, lay the tree down and press on the sides of the container to loosen the rootball. If roots have grown through the bottom of the pot, you may have to cut the container off to free the tree.

Loosen the Roots

Once the tree is out of the pot, look for any roots that might be circling the outer edge of the soil. **Use your fingers to loosen and spread these roots horizontally, away from trunk.** If they are too tightly wound to pry off by hand, use a utility knife to make four to six evenly spaced cuts, a few inches deep, from the top to the bottom of the root ball. This will remove any inner circling roots that could stunt the tree's growth.

Find the Root Flare

The flare (*or collar*) is where the trunk begins to widen and change into the root structure. **If necessary,** remove soil from around the trunk until you find the first woody root; the point just above that is the flare.



TREE PLANTING continued

Plant at the Right Depth

The planting hole should be **only as deep** as the rootball and twice as wide. The bottom of the pit should be undisturbed, or compacted, soil so the tree won't sink over time. **If you dig too deeply**, throw some soil back in the hole and pack it down until you get the right level. Place the tree in the hole with the root flare just above the ground. **Laying the handle of a shovel**, or some other long straightedge, across the top of the hole will help you check whether your tree is sitting at the proper planting height.

Straighten the Trunk

Make sure the tree is straight before you begin to fill the hole, looking at it from several different angles. Don't allow the tree to shift as you backfill. **Remove any air pockets** by lightly tamping down the soil as you go.

Make a Mulch-covered Moat

Circle the edges of the planting hole with mounded soil to form a moat that keeps water from running off. Mulch the hole with clean organic material (*such as compost, leaf mold or shredded hardwood*) using the "3-3-3 method"—3 inches of mulch in a 3-foot ring around the tree, leaving a 3-inch gap between the mulch and the tree trunk.

Water Well

After planting, add enough water so the entire hole is completely saturated. Deep, slow **watering once a week** is the most important factor in successfully establishing a new tree.

Become a Tree Tender

The PHS Tree Tenders program works with volunteer-based community groups to plant trees. The program provides workshops in tree planting and care and volunteer group organization. **PHS has trained more than 5,000 people** who have gone on to lead volunteers in planting over **1,300 trees each year**.

LEARN MORE

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[PHS McLean Library Trees Subject Guide](#)

[Tree Philly](#)

[Arbor Day Foundation](#)

Members get more!

Join today at [PHSonline.org](https://www.phsonline.org)

FAST FACT

A healthy urban environment has at least 30 percent of the land area shaded by trees. Philadelphia only has 20 percent coverage and as little as 2.5 percent in some neighborhoods.



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