

How to Plant a Small Tree: *Overview*

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2–4 hours

About \$50 for fertilizer and mulch

Skill Level: Hard

Takes lots of muscle. If the tree weighs more than 100 pounds, hire a landscape contractor or get a helper.



Q: I'd like to purchase a small tree. What's the proper way to plant it?
—*Maria Costa, Holbrook, Mass.*

Kim Hren, [Groundworks Landscaping Inc.](#), replies: The hardest part about planting any tree is moving it. A 6- to 8-footer with its root ball could easily weigh 200 pounds or more. If you plan on planting it yourself, have the garden center either help you pick a size that's easier to handle or deliver it to your house right where you want to plant it.

Make sure the site you select is at least 15 feet from the house, power lines, and other trees. And before you start digging, be sure to call 811. You'll be put in touch with a local service company that marks the location of any buried utility lines free of charge, saving you from any costly surprises. Once those details are taken care of, proceed with the steps on the next page. Your few hours of labor will pay off handsomely with a boost in curb appeal that will only get better with time.

Pictured: Landscapers Andy Silich and Randy Leland of Groundworks Landscaping secure the tree in its hole. Get a helper for any tree weighing more than 100 pounds.

Tools for This Project



Shovel



Tape measure



Wire cutters, to remove basket on root ball



Cultivator, to loosen root ball

Supplies You Will Need

1. Small tree
2. 3-4-3 Starter fertilizer to amend the soil
3. Bark mulch
4. Tregator water bag, available at tregator.com

Step by Step



1. Dig the hole

Dig a hole 1 foot in diameter for every 1 inch of trunk diameter, and 2 inches shallower than the distance from the bottom of the root ball to the root flare, where the trunk emerges from the ball. If you can't see the flare, pull back some of the burlap. Keep track of the depth with a shovel handle laid across the hole and a measuring tape.



2. Amend the soil

Pour a 3-4-3 starter fertilizer into the backfill and blend it in. Do not overfertilize; use only the amount listed on the bag for your root-ball size.



3. Position the tree

Gently roll the tree into the hole and set it upright. Rotate the tree until its best side faces the street (if it's in the front yard) or the house (if it's in the backyard).



4. Backfill with soil

Cut away the wire basket to at least 6 inches below the root ball's shoulder, and pull back the burlap. Use a cultivator to loosen the soil around the root ball. Backfill with the excavated soil up to grade. Tamp lightly as you go along to eliminate any air pockets.



5. Water and mulch

Form a 6-inch-high soil dam around the tree at the edge of the hole, then soak the roots with water. Knock down the lip after the water has been absorbed. Add mulch about 3 inches deep all around the tree, but pull it away from the trunk to discourage rot. Keep the roots moist by wrapping a [Tregator](#) water bag or two around the trunk. Fill it once a week for the next two years.