

# Planting and Caring For Your Trees



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation

## 25 MILLION TREES INITIATIVE

Help New York State meet its goal of planting 25 million trees by 2033! If you've planted a tree since January 1, 2024, scan the QR code to enter it into the Tree Tracker. Visit [on.ny.gov/25milliontrees](https://on.ny.gov/25milliontrees) for more information.



## Before You Plant

Planning is an important step when planting trees. With the right amount of preparation and follow-up care, you can give your tree its best chance of survival and help ensure it provides a lifetime of environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Before you plant:

- Consider the time of year—it is best to plant trees in the spring or fall.
- Know where underground utilities are located, as they could be damaged or pose a hazard to you as you dig. (Call 811 or visit [udignyny.org](https://www.udignyny.org) for more information.)
- Check for overhead powerlines, nearby structures, or other obstructions at your planting site, and make sure you choose a species with the right growth traits to fit the site (e.g., shorter trees for under powerlines, root systems that can handle the available growing space, etc.).
- Ensure you have the tools and supplies you'll need, including gloves, digging tools, water, pruning shears, and tree protection items (e.g., mulch, tree tubes, stakes, associated tools, etc.).
- Contact your local government offices for information on tree ordinances, restrictions on tree species, and other tree-related laws for your area.

It is best to plant bare-root seedlings the same day you acquire them. If that's not possible, keep them in their package and place them in a refrigerator until they can be planted, but not for more than two weeks. Make sure their roots stay moist by misting water into the package every few days and then sealing it back up. Potted stock that cannot be planted right away should be kept in the shade whenever possible and watered frequently.

## When You Plant

- If planting bare-root seedlings, remove them from their packaging and place them in a bucket of water for a few hours before planting.
- Dig a hole as deep as and wider than the tree's entire root system. The roots may be trimmed back a bit if they are very lengthy or if rocky soils make digging difficult, but do not trim more than 25% of the root system.
  - For potted stock, gently loosen the tree from its container by tapping all sides of the pot and ease the tree out without yanking the stem. Loosen any roots that may be wrapped around the packed soil.
  - For bare-root seedlings, gently untangle their roots so they hang naturally.
- Place the tree in the hole and refill it while supporting the tree upright from the middle. Make sure that the roots do not fold up on themselves and keep the root collar level with the soil line. (A yard stick laid across the top of the hole can help with positioning.)
- Firmly pack the soil around the tree, then water until the surrounding soil is moist but not soggy.



The root collar, or root flare, is where the trunk transitions into the root system.

# After You Plant

## Protecting Your Trees

Due to their small size and minimal root systems, newly planted trees are particularly vulnerable to damage by browsing wildlife and competition from more aggressive plants, such as invasive species. The following are a few tools that you can use to protect your tree. For best results, install protection the day of or soon after planting.

- Mulch protects roots from extreme temperatures and retains soil moisture. Make a 2- to 3-inch-thick “donut” around the tree, avoiding contact with the trunk and root flare. Do not mound the mulch up against the trunk (a mulch “volcano”), as this can encourage mold, fungal growth, and girdling roots.



Image credit: Sustainable Saratoga

- Stakes can stabilize new trees and mark their locations to prevent damage or loss from lawnmowers. Stakes should be attached on both sides of the tree using flexible, wide materials so that a tree is held upright, but not so tight that the ties would girdle it. Check the tree periodically to loosen the ties as the tree grows and remove the stakes once it can support itself.
- Tree tubes provide a physical barrier that significantly reduces browsing damage. They should be at least 5-foot tall to help protect against deer browse and flush with the ground to prevent rodents from getting underneath. Remove tree tubes when the trunk measures more than 2 inches wide at 6 inches from the

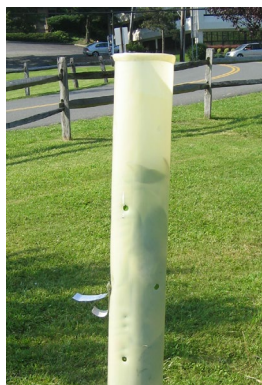


Image credit: Watershed Agricultural Council

ground. The following are general installation instructions:

- Hammer a stake firmly into the ground, 2–3 inches from the tree.
- Place the tube over the tree, making sure not to bend branches backward (pruning branches may be necessary).
- Press the tube down so it is flush with the ground and firmly attach it to the stake.

If you don't have tree tubes, stakes and fencing can be used to create a protective ring around a tree. This is especially useful if the tree is wider than the maximum size recommendation above or for protecting multiple trees together.

## Caring For Your Trees

- Water trees weekly from April through September, or until the ground freezes for evergreens, until the tree is established—in approximately 2–3 years. It is best to water in the morning or evening, not during the hottest part of the day, and make sure the soil around the tree is well saturated. If you notice signs of wilting, you may need to water more frequently.
- Carefully remove or trim competing vegetation growing within 1–2 feet of your tree to prevent crowding or shading while your tree becomes established.
- Periodically check your tree protection: reapply mulch, straighten stakes, and clear debris (fallen leaves, weeds, nests, etc.) out of tree tubes.
- Be careful when mowing near trees as the force of material exiting a mower's chute can damage their trunks.
- Check your trees periodically for bark damage, discolored or shredded leaves, unusual growth, etc. If needed, consult a tree care professional to determine if you should take further action to protect your trees.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

#### Urban and Community Forestry Program Division of Lands and Forests

625 Broadway Albany, NY 12233  
p: 518-402-9428 | [urbanforestry@dec.ny.gov](mailto:urbanforestry@dec.ny.gov)  
[www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)