



Planting and Caring for your Seedlings

Answers to Common Tree Planting Questions

TOP TEN TIPS FOR KEEPING TREES ALIVE

1. Handle trees with care and make sure the roots are kept moist.
2. Select the right tree for the area based on the site characteristics and location, making sure to avoid power lines, septic areas, foundations, and walkways.
3. Prepare the site by removing any other plants in the area and weed regularly.
4. Ensure holes are the proper size and properly prepared.
5. **DO NOT** include mulch/compost/fertilizer in holes when planting.
6. Insert trees straight into the hole, and ensure roots are correctly spread/buried.
7. Lightly pack soil when re-filling holes to remove all air pockets around roots.
8. Water plants after transplanting and regularly throughout the summer for the first year.
9. **DO NOT** apply mulch directly around the trunk of the tree. Instead create a “doughnut” of mulch around the tree to avoid rots and molds.
10. Mark tree locations to avoid mowing small, young seedlings!

- **Site Selection**

Every plant is adapted to grow in specific conditions of light, soil, and moisture. Selecting the right plants for the area is key to successfully transplanting seedlings. Make sure to check species site requirements before purchase and planting.

- **Avoid planting in the following situations:**

- Within 50 feet of septic drain fields
- Within 10 feet of buildings or 20 feet of utility lines
- Within 100 feet of buildings and driveways (for windbreaks)
- Where they will obstruct the view near roads
- Where roots could damage driveways, sidewalks or roads

- **Site Preparation**

Before transplanting, make sure that the area is clear of weeds, grass and other competition for at least **9 square feet**. Continue weed removal throughout the summer to ensure the new seedlings have minimal competition while establishing. Both mechanical and chemical methods to remove competition are effective. Be very cautious of applying products containing imazapyr in the vicinity of trees, shrubs and other desirable plants. Imazapyr is an active ingredient in many herbicide products including a variety of Roundups (Extended Control/365). Imazapyr persists for a year or more in soil, it is important to understand that planting seeds or transplants into imazapyr-contaminated soil may result in harm to these plants. Please check the label of any “icide” and always follow the directions for application.

- **Pre-Planting Care**

Before planting, keep seedlings in a cool, dark place. Always keep the roots moist, but **do not submerge them in water**. Instead, roots can be covered in damp material, such as mulch or newspaper. Seedlings can be kept in cold storage (35-45 degrees) for up to 5 days. For up to 2 weeks, seedlings can be temporarily planted in a ditch in a shady area.

- **Time of Planting**

Seedlings should be planted while in dormancy, before root tips turn white, or buds begin to break. In Michigan, bare root seedlings should be planted when soils are moist, after the last frost and before June 1.

- **Seedling Spacing**

Spacing is dependent on desired outcome and adult tree size.

Van Buren Conservation District

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- **General Spacing Guidelines**

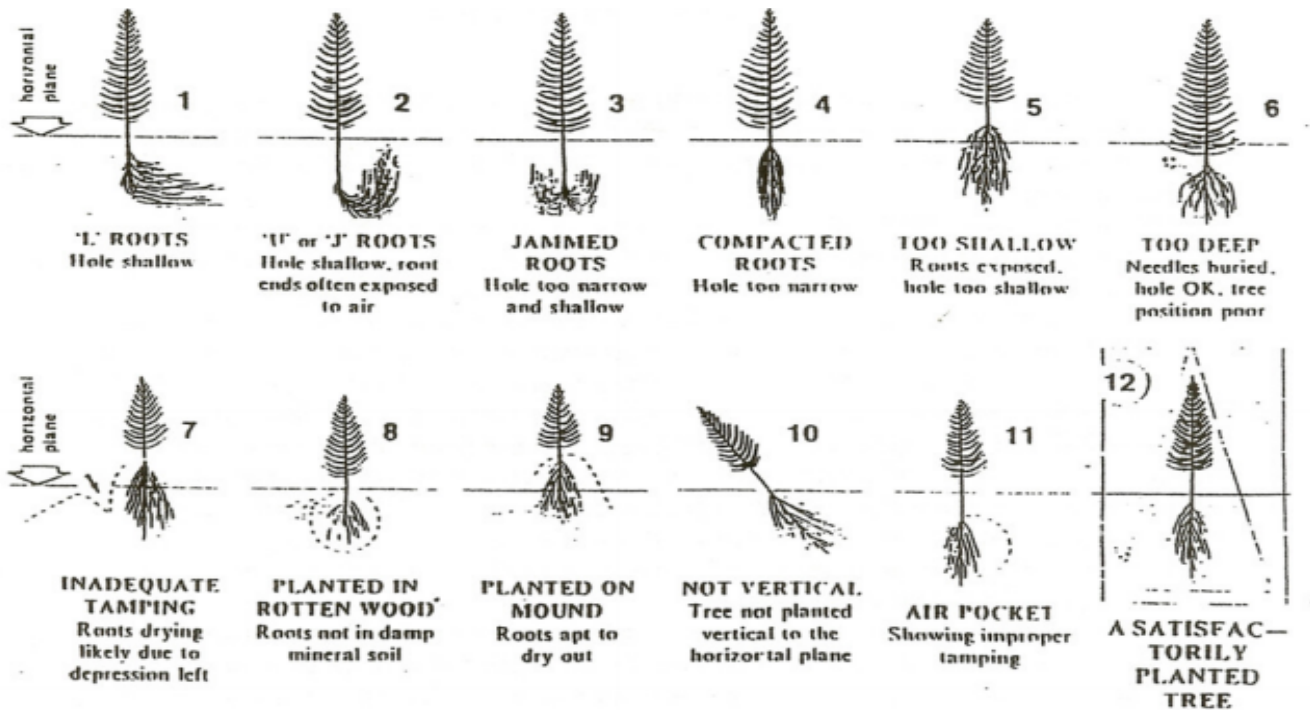
- o **Windbreaks** – 8-10' between trees, 12-20' between each of 3-4 staggered rows
- o **Reforestation/Erosion Control:**
 - **Conifers**–8-10' between trees, 6-7' between rows
 - **Hardwoods**–7-12' between trees, 7-12' between rows

- **Planting your Seedlings**

The planting hole should be large enough so that the seedling's roots can spread out naturally. Roots may be pruned, **no more than 25% of the total root length**, to make planting easier and help increase survival.

The following will help you plant most seedlings

1. Drive the blade of a shovel or planting bar into the soil and push the handle back and forth to **create a "V" shaped hole**.
2. Insert the plant into the hole with the **stem straight** and **an inch deeper than it was planted** in the nursery. (Look for a soil line on the stem indicating the depth it was planted at the nursery.) **Spread the roots out** so they are not pointed the same direction or curled.
3. Push the soil back around the seedling and **pack it firmly to prevent air pockets**. You **do not need to stomp on most soils**. Give the seedling a slight tug. If it does not pull easily out of the soil, then it is packed well.



- **Post-Planting Care**

Water, water, water!! The need for irrigation will depend on the amount of rainfall. If it is possible to get water to the seedlings, irrigate when the soil feels dry, or **any time there is less than one inch of rainfall per week**. Placing a 4 inch layer of mulch in a 2 foot radius around the seedlings will help hold moisture and reduce the need for watering. **Keep the mulch 6 inches from the main stem** to prevent feeding damage from rodents. Mulch will also help to control competing vegetation around the seedling. Competing vegetation should be controlled for at least 3 growing seasons. Protect seedlings from damage from fire, insects, disease, and animals until well established. Fertilizer should not be applied to seedlings for at least one year.