

Planting and caring for your trees and shrubs

The woody plants you have ordered will come in 5-gallon containers and will be about 18-24 inches tall. Their small size is an advantage, because young trees will establish much more quickly and need less coddling than full-grown trees. They will be much more likely to survive the first year, and they will be much less stressed by transplanting, so they will grow quickly. Within a few years, your tree or shrub should be filling out the space you have planned for it. Starting with young plants also is much more affordable than buying full-grown trees.

Since your woody plant is starting out small, be sure to leave extra space around each plant to allow room to grow. The descriptions of each species on the website (www.gogreenwilmette.org/plantsale) will help you know how large to expect each plant to grow.

If possible, plant your tree or shrub on a day that is cloudy, not too hot, and not very windy. Better yet, plant just before a nice, gentle rain! Planting in the evening can help avoid harsh conditions if the weather is hot and sunny.

Dig a hole about twice as wide as the pot and several inches deeper. Turn the pot sideways, hold the plant where the stem meets the soil, and gently coax it out of the pot. If the roots are very thick and matted, take a serrated knife or trowel and run it across the roots in a few places to break them up. This encourages new root growth and can prevent overgrown roots from strangling the plant.

Toss a few inches of potting soil or good, loose dirt into the bottom of the hole, and then place the plant in the hole, retaining as much of the attached, potted soil as possible. Gently scoop in potting soil or loose dirt around the plant. Plant the seedling no deeper than its original depth.

Water the newly planted tree very thoroughly, until the soil no longer holds water. You can place a garden hose at the base of the tree, turn it on to a low trickle, and leave it there for several hours. (Set a timer so you don't forget!) Water again the next day, and at least once a week for about a month – more often if it is hot and dry. After this, you only need to water if the weather is very hot and dry or if the plant looks stressed or wilted.

Hardwood mulch (available free at the Wilmette Park District's West Park) placed around the tree will help retain moisture. However, mulch should be kept away from the stem – shape it like a doughnut around the tree. Mulch also should not be very thick, as this may encourage the tree to develop shallow roots rather than putting down deep roots in search of water. Mulch is generally not necessary, so long as the tree is well watered during the first season, and during any stressful weather thereafter.