

Tree-Planting Project Guide for Congregations/Communities

Your congregation may want to sponsor a tree planting project to encourage creation care. In addition to the benefits of adding eventual tree canopy, these projects can build community and teach skills and values to youth and adults alike. A tree planting guide has been developed for the purpose of encouraging success in planning and executing congregational and/or community tree planting projects. Feel free to edit your copy to suit your purpose.

Tree **seedlings** have bare roots. They might be 12-24" long. They may grow fast enough to catch up with potted/ burlapped **saplings** within 5 years. They are cheaper and quicker to plant.

This document will cover both means of growing new trees.

Supplies - Each tree will need a **5 gallon bucket** with a 1/8" hole drilled in it, a half inch up the side from the bottom of the bucket.

shovel, pruner or sharp knife, plastic or metal material for cages to keep critters away, mulch

Planning ~

IF this is a community or church project, be sure to get publicity out early, including that the planting date(s) may be tentative, depending on your tree availability. When you order, ask when you can expect delivery. If it rains, wear your rain gear, that's great weather for baby trees!

- 1) Ordering species can be done with the help of your city forester/city government. Native species will tend to do better, and you want to avoid species such as ash that will be vulnerable to diseases.
- 2) It is important to think carefully about where you want to plant your tree. It should be 20-30 feet from the house and 15 feet from concrete sidewalk or driveway. You should not plant under electrical wires. Call 811 to make sure there are no wires, cables, or pipelines under your planting area. It might take 2 to 3 days for them to do their localization services. Just flag your tree location so you don't have to be there when they come. If you want to plant a tree on the boulevard, you should contact your city forester or city government to find out requirements.

Planting ~

- 1) **Plant your tree as soon as possible.** This may require flexibility in planning a planting date(s).
- 2) It is important, if you can't plant the tree as soon as you get it home, that you store seedlings in a cooler or old refrigerator, at about 35°. Don't freeze or thaw your seedling repetitively. Keep saplings that are potted in the shade and keep well watered.
- 3) **Keep the roots damp** at all times. Do not leave the seedlings in a bag in the sun, nor soaking in a bucket of water for a long time. It's ok to dunk them in a water bucket if you think the roots are drying out..

For both seedlings and saplings, place it in the center of the hole so that it is vertical. If you have some help you can have someone hold it at the proper level. The root collar, where the trunk flares just above the root, should be slightly below the ground line. Make sure you don't have roots exposed to the air.

4) When you're ready to plant ~

a) for a potted tree, remove the sod from an approximately 2 foot diameter circle in the designated spot. Then dig a hole with your shovel approximately 15" in diameter and 18" deep. Take the tree from the pot and check its roots. If they are circling the root ball, those circling roots must be cut with a pruner, sharp knife, or box cutter. Make four vertical cuts on the surface of the root ball where the circling occurs. Place the ball in the center of the hole and fill in the hole with loose dirt and pack firmly around the roots to achieve good root to soil contact.

If you don't see lots of circling roots when you remove the pot, you don't need to cut any roots.

b) for a seedling, use a shovel put straight into the ground and rock it back and forth to open a 2" wide opening. Plant the seedling so that the main root is straight down, not doubled over or sharply bent. Trim the roots if they are extremely long. Then use the shovel again in a similar manner about 1" behind the first cut. Keep the shovel in the ground and rock the shovel back and forth to close the first hole. Remove the shovel and stomp the ground vigorously to seal the entire hole.

Care and Watering ~

5) Water your new tree well to soak the planting hole. Apply approximately 6 inches of mulch in a 2 foot diameter circle leaving room for your 5 gallon bucket.

6) Place the 5 gallon bucket adjacent to the tree with the hole facing the tree. Then place the cage around both the bucket and tree.

7) Make sure the tree gets at least an inch of rain or water each week for at least the first year until freeze up in the late fall or winter. If you fill the bucket with water three times a week that should be sufficient. Just hold off if you get a significant rain.

8) Your tree will be safer from rabbits and deer if you put a 2' diameter circle of plastic or wire fence around it. Make sure the cage is big enough to fit around the bucket with the tree in the center and still get the cage closed. You can use 2"x4" welded wire fencing, 6' tall, cut into a 6.25' length for each tree. This will put the tree a bit off center when you place the cage around it and the bucket. You could also place hardware cloth over the top of the bucket to keep mown grass from falling in and plugging the hole.

Iowa <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Forestry/State-Forest-Nursery>