DOCTOR'S
Lawn and Landscape
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PLANTING TREES & SHRUBS PROPERLY

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PROPER TECHNIQUE

Proper planting gives new trees and shrubs the best opportunity to establish healthy root systems and thrive long-term. Planting too deeply, improper backfilling, excessive mulch, and poor watering are common causes of problems after installation.

Follow these 8 essential steps to ensure your trees and shrubs are planted properly, giving them the best possible start and the greatest chance to thrive for years to come.

1. Choose the right location
2. Dig Wide, Not Deep
3. Set the proper planting height
4. Prepare the root ball
5. Backfill the planting hole
6. Water thoroughly
7. Mulch properly
8. Stake ONLY when necessary









CHOOSE THE RIGHT LOCATION

Before planting, consider the plant's mature size, sunlight requirements, drainage, and available space. Be aware of nearby structures, utilities, sidewalks, driveways, and overhead obstructions.

DIG WIDE, NOT DEEP

- Dig the planting hole approximately **2–3 times wider than the root ball**
- The hole should generally be no deeper than the root ball
- Loosen compacted soil along the sides of the planting hole to encourage roots to grow outward

SET THE PROPER PLANTING HEIGHT

- Identify the root flare—the area where the trunk begins to widen into the upper roots
- Position the root flare **at or slightly above finished grade**
- Avoid planting too deeply or covering the root flare with soil
- In poorly drained or heavy clay soils, slightly elevated planting may be appropriate

PREPARE THE ROOT BALL

- **Container-Grown Plants**
  - Carefully remove the container before planting
  - Loosen or separate tightly circling roots so they can grow outward into the surrounding soil
- **Balled & Burlapped Plants**
  - Position the plant correctly before removing or cutting away accessible twine, burlap, and other material as appropriate
  - Avoid damaging or unnecessarily disturbing the root ball during installation

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BACKFILL THE PLANTING HOLE

- Backfill around the root ball using the excavated soil unless site conditions require otherwise
- Fill gradually and lightly firm the soil to eliminate large air pockets
- Avoid heavily compacting the soil around the root ball
- Maintain the original planting height as the hole is backfilled

WATER THOROUGHLY

Water immediately after planting to thoroughly moisten the root ball and surrounding soil and help settle the backfill. Continue monitoring soil moisture closely throughout the establishment period. Refer to the **General Watering Guide** for additional watering recommendations.

MULCH PROPERLY

- Apply approximately **2–3 inches of mulch** around the planting area
- Spread mulch outward over the root zone
- Keep mulch pulled slightly away from the trunk or stems
- Never mound mulch against the trunk or create a “mulch volcano”

STAKE ONLY WHEN NECESSARY

- Most properly planted trees do not require staking. When additional support is necessary due to site conditions, tree size, or wind exposure, staking should allow some natural trunk movement and should not remain in place longer than necessary.

AFTER PLANTING

Newly planted trees and shrubs require regular monitoring as they establish. Watch for changes in soil moisture, settling, plant stress, animal damage, or other concerns, and address potential problems early.

Proper planting is only the beginning—consistent watering and ongoing care are essential to successful establishment.