

TREE PLACEMENT 101:

**Safe, Smart, and
Sustainable**



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PLAN AHEAD FOR A HEALTHY TREE

Planting a tree in the right spot sets it up for long-term success. A carefully chosen location helps prevent costly problems down the road, like lifted sidewalks, damaged foundations, or utility line conflicts. Healthy, well-placed trees provide lasting benefits: they offer cooling shade, reduce energy bills, support birds and pollinators, absorb stormwater, and make neighborhoods more beautiful and walkable. A little planning now means a thriving tree for decades to come.



Right Tree Right Place

Tree Size Guidelines

- **Type C** (*under 25 ft*): Great near homes, patios, and under power lines.
- **Type B** (*25–50 ft*): Best for open yards with more space.
- **Type A** (*50+ ft*): Need lots of room—plant far from buildings and wires.

Remember: Tree roots can extend 1.5–2 times the canopy width. Leave space for roots to grow without damaging sidewalks or foundations.

Planting Guidelines

- 4 feet from any marked utility or as indicated by the resident.
- Only **Type C** trees can be planted under power lines.
- Ensure the tree is **10 feet** from driveways and **30 feet** from intersections.
- Easement must be 3-5 feet to plant a Type C tree.

Planting in an Easement?

Contact Metro Urban Forestry to approve your street tree location and species before planting.

Tree Size:	Plant Where?	Avoid...
C Trees (Under 25 ft)	Under utility lines, in small front yards, narrow planting strips (4–5 ft wide), near patios or driveways	Planting too close to buildings or walkways without enough clearance for mature canopy and roots
B Trees (25-50 ft)	Larger yards, wide tree lawns (5–8 ft), near streets without overhead wires, as shade trees	Planting directly under power lines or too close to sidewalks where roots may lift pavement
A Trees (50+ ft)	Parks, public greenspaces, large yards, center medians, and open corners with ample space	Small planting strips, under or near overhead wires, or near foundations and driveways

SITE FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Above-Ground Hazards

- Power Lines: Especially twisted service wires typically carry electricity.
- Sidewalks & Driveways: Allow space for root growth without lifting pavement.
- Buildings & Fences: Avoid planting too close to structures.
- Fire Hydrants: Maintain at least 3 feet of clearance.
- Street Corners: Ensure visibility for drivers — don't block sightlines.

Underground Hazards

- Call 811 Before You Dig: Always check for underground utilities.
 - Utility Markings:
 - Red = Electric
 - Yellow = Gas
 - Blue = Water
 - Orange = Internet/Cable
- Other Hazards: Watch for water meters, gas meters, sewer laterals, and private utility lines.

Soil Conditions

- Soil Volume: Ensure adequate space for root development, especially for medium and large trees.
- Compaction: Avoid heavily compacted soils that limit growth and water infiltration.
- Drainage: Avoid planting in areas with poor or standing water drainage.
- Contamination Risk: Be cautious near former industrial sites, gas stations, or high runoff zones.

Sunlight & Microclimate

- Sun Exposure: Choose species suited to full sun, partial shade, or full shade.
- Wind Exposure: Open, windy areas may stress young trees — stake when needed.
- Heat Islands: Prioritize shade-tolerant trees in paved or high-heat areas.
- Wildlife Support: Prefer native species that provide habitat for pollinators and birds.



COMMUNITY AND EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Tree Canopy Gaps**
 - Prioritize neighborhoods with low canopy cover and higher heat exposure — often the same areas facing historic disinvestment.
- **Community Involvement**
 - Engage residents in the process of choosing and caring for trees. Offer multilingual resources and inclusive outreach.
- **Environmental Justice**
 - Use tree planting to improve conditions near highways, industrial zones, or areas with flood risk — not just to beautify wealthier regions.
- **Shade Where It's Needed**
 - Plant where people walk, wait, and gather: near bus stops, sidewalks, schools, and playgrounds.
- **Avoid Displacement Risks**
 - Pair green investment with policies that help current residents stay, so tree planting doesn't accelerate gentrification.
- **Accessible Design**
 - Ensure trees don't block walkways, ramps, or curb cuts — good design supports everyone, including those with disabilities.
- **Equitable Maintenance**
 - Ensure all neighborhoods receive consistent follow-up care, not just those with more visibility or resources.



TREE PLANTING GUIDE

Pick the Site Thoughtfully

- Select a location that allows for the tree's mature size, proper spacing from structures and other trees, adequate sunlight, and safe clearance from overhead and underground utilities.

Call 811 Before You Dig

- Contact 811 to identify underground utilities. Review color-coded markings and ensure clearances are respected to avoid damaging essential services.

Prepare the Site and the Tree

- Remove all nursery tags, wires, and burlap from the trunk and root ball.
- Use clean, sharp tools to prevent the spread of pests and diseases.
- Follow all proper tool safety guidelines.

Locate the Root Flare

- Identify the root flare, where the trunk widens into the roots. After planting, this should be visible just above the soil surface. Do not bury it.

Dig the Planting Hole

- Shape: Wide and shallow like a teacup — 2 times the width of the root ball.
- Depth: No deeper than the root ball. The root flare should sit at or slightly above ground level.

Place and Straighten the Tree

- Roll the tree gently into the hole. Use fixed reference points (like street signs or fences) to ensure it is straight from all angles.

Backfill with Soil

- Replace soil gradually around the root ball.
- Gently tamp down to eliminate air pockets.
- Pause halfway to ensure the tree is straight.

Build a Berm and Apply Mulch

- Form a shallow berm around the planting hole to retain water.
- Apply mulch using the 3-3-3 Rule:
 - 3 feet wide
 - 3 inches deep
 - Keep 3 inches away from the trunk to prevent rot and pests.

Water Thoroughly

- Water immediately after planting.
- Continue watering weekly, from May through September, for at least the first three years.