



How to Plant and Care for Your Tree Seedlings

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Storage: Seedlings should be planted as soon as possible. Never store longer than 4 weeks. To store, keep roots moist (but not wet) and covered. Keep trees in a cool shaded area such as the north side of a building (no metal siding), in an unheated building (again, not metal), or in the shade of a dense conifer.

Choosing a Planting Site: Choose an area that is well drained (no standing water), sunny, yet protected from the scorching summer sun and drying winds. Do not plant trees under power lines or above underground utility lines. Allow at least 10-15 feet of clearance for structures, sidewalks, and streets. To gauge how far trees need to be spaced apart, refer to your species information sheet for adult size.

Soil Amendments: No fertilizers or soil amendments are recommended for the first two years. If soil is devoid of organic material, such as sand/gravel or heavy clay, then changes may be necessary. Use 3-parts native soil to 1-part amendments. Use peat and compost to amend sand/gravel; use sand to amend heavy clay.

above the roots. This collar needs to be at ground level when planted. Either “eyeball” this or place a straight guide (yardstick, piece of wood, etc.) across the hole. Likewise, the soil of filled-in holes needs to be level with the surrounding ground. When soil is too low or high root death occurs. Never use your feet to tamp down soil; use your hands (stepping over-packs soil and tears delicate roots). For **bare-root seedlings** sit the tree atop the mound with the roots spread down the sides and adjust mound height so the root collar is level with the ground. **NOTE:** for seedlings with tap roots, bury this root down through the center of the mound first. Next, fill the hole about 2/3 full. Make sure soil is distributed evenly and free of rocks, dirt clods, and any objects that can block root growth. Thoroughly water the soil to eliminate air pockets and ensure contact between roots and soil. When the water has drained away, add the rest of the soil. For **plug seedlings** hold the seedling straight up in the hole and adjust hole depth so the collar is level to ground. Fill the hole in; distributing soil evenly, **making sure roots stay straight**, and avoiding rocks, dirt clods, etc.

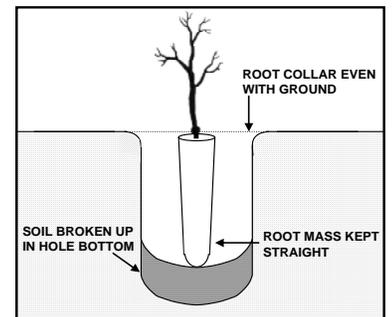
Digging the Holes: Have everything ready for planting **before** you unwrap the seedlings. You will need digging tools, hand-pruners, mulch, and ready water. Clear a 2-3 foot wide circle of vegetation for each hole. Break up the soil (backfill and soil at the bottom of the holes). For **bare-root seedlings** dig 6 inches deeper than the root length and at least two feet wide. Backfill loose dirt to form a mound of soil in the center of the hole, almost as high as ground level. For **plug seedlings** dig holes at least six inches wide and a couple inches deeper than the containers.

Seedling Preparation: Once the roots are exposed, their cells begin to die, so prepare seedlings one at a time and plant as quickly as possible. For **bare-root seedlings**, an alternate method is to have a bucket of water handy on planting day to store multiple seedlings, taking them out one at a time to plant. For bare-root seedlings use a sharp hand-pruner to cleanly cut any broken or damaged roots. Cut just above the damaged area. Also trim extremely long roots so they can lie flat without wrapping or turning. **NOTE:** Some tree species have a taproot. This root is noticeably longer and thicker than other roots. Do **not** cut this root. For **plug seedlings** gently remove tree from container (slide out, or turn upside-down and tap on rock or tool edge). If it does not slide out easily, roll the container between your palms adding enough pressure to squeeze the container. If this does not work, check the bottom of the container for roots that might be caught. Cut these blocking roots with a sharp pair of hand-pruners to leave a clean edge. If the seedling is still stuck, use pruners or a pocketknife to cut the container free. Once free of the container, check if the roots are tightly packed and wound around. If so, gently loosen them with your fingers.

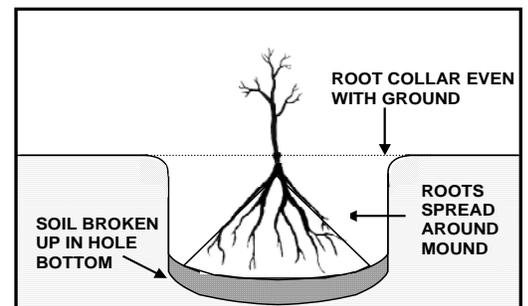
Planting: Find the seedling’s root collar.

This is a slight bump or color change just

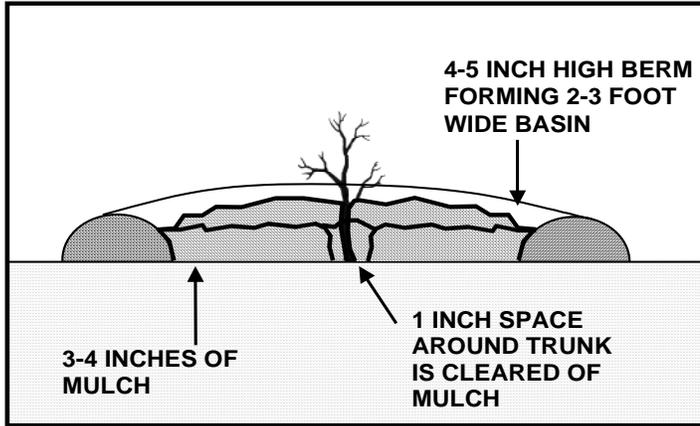
PLUG SEEDLINGS



BARE-ROOT SEEDLINGS



Berms and Underlayment: To control weeds and help retain moisture, consider adding a layer of weed cloth, cardboard, or 5-10 layers of newspaper on top of the ground surrounding the tree (the latter options also provide nutrients as they decompose). Water the underlayment enough that it conforms to the contour of the ground. Next construct berms around the trees. The berms (rings or “donuts” of soil built around trees to trap water) need to be about 4-5 inches high and 2-3 feet across for seedlings. If desired, trim the underlayment extending past the berm.



Mulch: Mulch (bark/tree chips, straw, leaves, etc., but **not** grass trimmings) is a must in New Mexico. It holds in moisture, keeps soil from getting too cold or hot, discourages weeds, and provides nutrients to the tree. When *buying* mulch, make sure it is OK for use with plants (not “landscaping” mixes) and is preferably “weed-free”. Whether purchasing or using homemade mulch, avoid materials that were sprayed with harmful chemicals (e.g. herbicides). After building the berm, spread mulch inside the ring 3-4 inches deep. Leave a 1-inch space around the tree’s trunk free of mulch. As a last step, fill the berm with water and allow it to soak in 2 or 3 times until the soil is thoroughly wet.

Aftercare Watering: The most crucial time for the survival of a tree is the first few weeks. A newly planted tree will need water more often than an older tree because its roots have not yet taken a firm hold into the surrounding soil to find moisture. During the first week, check the soil (about 6 inches out from the tree trunk) by feeling for moisture about 2-3 inches down every 2-3 days with your finger or a wooden probe. Check **every day** if you plant during the summer. Water if it feels dry. The soil should feel moist – not dry, not wet. **The next two weeks after planting, water trees every 1 to 3 days.**

Long-Term Watering: Even though trees may be drought-tolerant, they **need** supplemental water to establish their root system. Follow the following guidelines for the first two years. Certain species, like Bur and Shumard Oak, need plenty of additional water for about 4 years.

Spring (moderate temperatures, Feb.-mid May) – 2 to 3 times a week

Fall (moderate temps, Sept.-mid Nov.) – 1 to 3 times a week

Winter (low temps, Dec.-mid Feb.) – water if there is no precipitation for at least one month

Summer (high temps, May-August) – water 3 to 5 times a week. Water every day if necessary, during hottest weather.

Maintenance: Replenish **mulch** when needed and increase the area of mulching as the tree grows until circle is 5-6 feet across. The first year, tree roots will be within the **berm**. As the tree grows, the roots will extend beyond the watering basin so the berm will need to be enlarged. Use berms only for the first 2 or 3 years. For further information on planting and site selection as well as

information on pruning, staking, transplanting, and insect and disease control, Tree New Mexico has published a *Citizen Tree Planting Manual*, which is available for purchase using the form at right.

FEEDBACK FORM	Name(s) _____	Phone: _____
	Address _____	City _____ Zip _____
Memberships	Receive Information	Other Requests
<input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 (receive TNM window sticker) <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 (sticker and seed packet) <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 (sticker and tree care manual) <input type="checkbox"/> Don't print my name in newsletter.	<input type="checkbox"/> Buy Citizen Tree Manual. Qty: ____ x \$20 per (+2.50 S&H per) = ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Dedication Tree Program <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Education Programs <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Tree Workshops <input type="checkbox"/> River Rescue Program	<input type="checkbox"/> Add me to the mailing list. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove me from mailing list. <input type="checkbox"/> Call me about volunteering. <input type="checkbox"/> Call me about upcoming workshops. <input type="checkbox"/> How can businesses help out? <input type="checkbox"/> I want to know about TNM products.
Address Checks and Mail this form to: Tree New Mexico · P.O. Box 81827 · Albuquerque, NM · 87198-1827		