

# **Treeways**

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## **My Baby Tree Can Grow Faster and Healthier**

Every tree seed starts life coded with all the information it needs to grow into a healthy seedling, sapling, and eventually a mature adult. However, once the seed germinates its future success depends on soil conditions, adequate moisture, reasonable weather, and if we humans are involved, us not hindering the tree's success by us either giving too much or too little loving care. Most trees in our landscapes are planted as bare root, potted saplings, or juvenile trees with trunk diameters of less than 3". These trees are typically 6" to 15' tall at planting and may or may not have been well cared for by its nursery grower. Once you have chosen and picked up your baby tree the care you give will affect its entire life and for some species that means hundreds of years. Here are some basic guidelines:

1. Keep your baby tree cool and moist from purchase through planting in its forever location, especially the roots.
2. Trim broken, damaged, circling, or other dysfunctional roots just before planting.
3. Only remove broken or damaged branches back to healthy tissue. The more you prune away the slower the baby tree will grow.
4. Prepare a \$100 planting site even if your baby tree only costs you one dollar.
  - A. Remove sod, grass, or weeds from the planting site.
  - B. Loosen the soil to a depth of about a shovel blade in a 4-6' diameter circle and blend in a bag of compost to replace the volume of the removed sod, grass, and weeds.
  - C. Dig the planting hole just deep enough so that the root ball or bare root tip will just touch the bottom of the hole when the root collar is no more than 1" below the planting soil surface. The root collar is where the tree trunk flares out into its roots.
5. While an assistant holds the baby tree upright and at the correct depth in the hole, refill the planting hole with the blended soil. Firm the soil using your balled up fists by leaning in from a kneeling position.
6. Sprinkle about 1 quart of C 20 soil amendment or similar product in a ring about 12" from the baby trees' trunk.
7. Apply shredded wood mulch in a donut shape around the new tree leaving about 4" of air space with no mulch at the tree trunk. Mulch should be 3-4" depth. A 4' diameter mulch ring is good, a 5' diameter mulch ring is better, a 6-8' diameter ring is great. If you want to help your young tree grow faster and healthier wider mulch rings are better and here is why. At the baby tree stage trees are not very strong competitors for water, nutrients and light while grasses and weeds are super competitive. Hold back the weed and grass competition with mulch and the tree has much better access to water, nutrients and light and may grow 3 times faster in its early years.
8. Water as needed for your soil type, especially the first three years and most especially when we have drought type weather conditions. A baby tree may need only a 5 gallon pail of water per week when there is no significant rain that week.
9. Prevent damage by critters (voles, deer, and rabbits) and you are doing the best you can for your baby trees.

Now enjoy the fun you just had planting a tree and know that you have made your property, your neighborhood, your community, and your world a better place. Thank you for your service! Trees are the answer, especially when they live long and prosper.