HOW DO I...
PLANT A TREE?
(OR SHRUBS AND OTHER PLANTS)

One of the easiest ways to beautify your home and community and improve the environment is to add plants. This guide explains the basic steps for planting a tree—or any type of plant! There are trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants for every taste, location and climate. Before you plant, choose your garden site—where do you want to put your plants? Make sure to choose plants suitable to your location and goals.

WHAT YOU NEED

SHOVEL
If you are planting a tree or shrubs

TROWEL
If you are planting herbs/bulbs

SMALL KNIFE
An old steak knife or utility knife

A FRIEND
If you are planting large trees!

GLOVES

WATER
Lots of it!

TRASH BAG
Or tarp

BENEFITS

Beautify

Exercise

Provides Habitat

Improves air quality

REDUCE STORMWATER AND EROSION

INCREASE PROPERTY VALUE
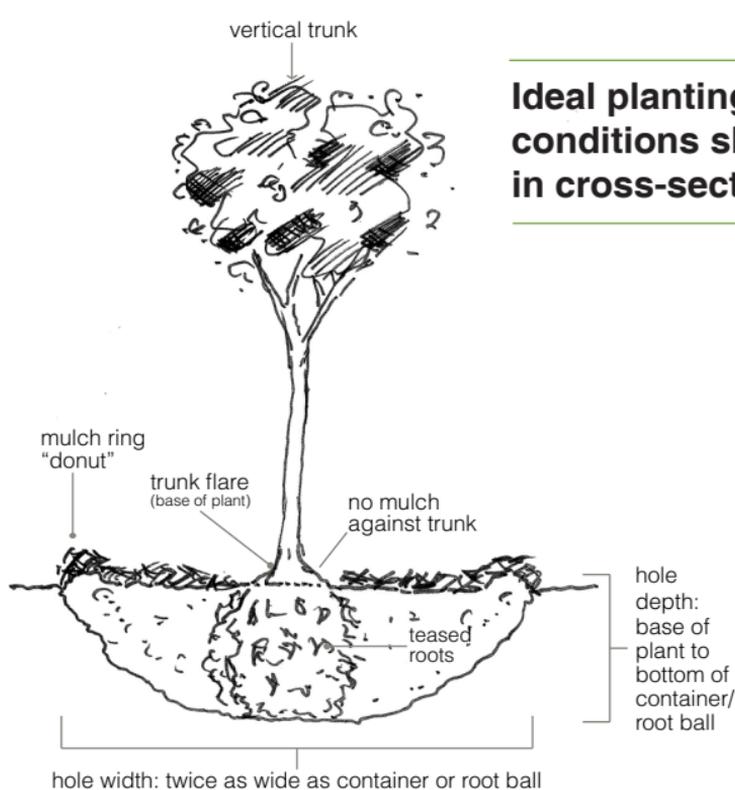
REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES

GETTING STARTED

1 SITE YOUR PLANT. Determine where you want to place your plant. Check the mature size of your plant to make sure it will have enough room to grow.

2 **DIG A HOLE.** With your shovel tip or spray paint, mark off a space that is round and twice as wide as the pot (or root ball). This width leaves room for roots, many of which grow horizontal. Then start digging! Putting the soil on a tarp as you dig makes it easy and tidier when you fill the hole later. Make sure there is no grass in the soil you will refill with—grass can strangle out your new plant. Dig as deep as there is soil in the pot and no deeper. Measure by placing the pot in the hole.

3 **PREP THE ROOTS.** Take your plant out of its container. (If you happen to be planting a balled & burlapped or bare root tree, skip to step 4.) Look at the roots. You are going to get your hands dirty by working your fingers into the roots and teasing them out. Ideally you'll make the roots look like a mess of roots, not like the shape of the pot. If the roots have formed a solid wall around the inside of the pot, it's ok to make shallow cuts 3-4 times— slice from the top of the root and soil mass to the bottom, not side to side. Be careful, but don't be overly gentle. This is true of anything grown in a container.

vertical trunk

Ideal planting conditions shown in cross-section

mulch ring "donut"

trunk flare (base of plant)

no mulch against trunk

teased roots

hole depth: base of plant to bottom of container/ root ball

hole width: twice as wide as container or root ball

4 **LEVEL IT OUT.** Place your prepped plant in the hole and double-check the depth. The plant base must be level with the ground. Not 1 inch too low or high—though if you must, err on the side of too high.

5 **FILL THE HOLE.** Once the plant is at a good depth, start filling in. Remember: no grass in the soil around the roots! When you are about half way, gently tamp down the soil in place and water. After the water has settled, fill in the rest of the hole. Make sure not to fill past the existing ground level and the base of the plant. Water again.

6 **MULCH.** If you are planting flowers, spread an even layer of mulch between all plants when you are done. Aim for about 3 inches of depth. Be sure not to get too close to the base of the plant, but don't leave any bare soil between plants. If you are planting trees and shrubs, spread an even layer in a circle around the base, but don't put mulch against the bark. Doing this will cause the trunk to rot, which leaves the tree susceptible to disease. Then form mulch that looks like a donut around each plant, not a "volcano." Mulch helps soil retain moisture and the ring helps keep the water in place.

TIPS & FAQS

Call Miss Utility before you dig.

✔ Two weeks before you plant, call Miss Utility at 1-800-257-7777. (MD, DC, and DE residents)

When should I purchase my plants?

✔ Get your tree(s) the day of or at least within a week of when you will plant. If you buy a few days ahead, check regularly if the plants need water (is the first inch or two of soil dry to the touch?). Keep plants in a shady, secure location.

It is best to plant in the fall or early spring. Also it is preferable to plant after blooming is over. A plant puts a lot of energy into its flowers, so if you transplant during blooming, the plant is more stressed and more susceptible to disease and decline.

Add color with bulbs

✔ Since you're already digging a hole for your plant, add some bulbs, like daffodils

and hyacinths, to the soil for a splash of early spring color. Generally, plant 6 inches deep and in groups of 3, 5 or 7, but following the package or nursery center guidelines is always best.

Protecting your new plants

✔ When mowing or weed whacking, make sure you keep clear of your plants. Nicking the trunk of a tree or shrub damages tissues that bring water and nutrients to and from the roots and branches.

Remove all tags and string from branches or trunks after planting. Save the label so you remember what you planted!

How can I get rid of grass?

✔ Lay down about 10 sheets of newspaper or a layer of cardboard on the soil underneath your mulch to keep grass at bay.

RESOURCES

How to choose a tree
www.trees.maryland.gov/pickatree.asp

TreeMendous Maryland program
www.trees.maryland.gov/treemendous.asp

International Society of Arboriculture
www.isa-arbor.com

Miss Utility
www.missutility.net

Baltimore, Maryland:

www.treebaltimore.org (You can get free trees!)

www.baltimoretreetrust.org (Become a TreeKeeper.)

www.parksandpeople.org
(Check out their Community Greening Resource Network.)

Prince George's County, Maryland:

Clean Up, Green Up program
(Search "clean up green up"; see most recent results.)
www.princegeorgescountymd.gov

Rain Check Rebate program
(See "Urban Tree Canopy" info.)
www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/sites/
StormwaterManagement/RainCheck

Tree ReLeaf Grant program
(Services drop-down, then Community Outreach.)
www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/sites/Sustainable