

TOP TROPICALS GUIDE TO IN-GROUND PLANTING: HOW TO PLANT A TREE

School level: *Plant School
Middle School
and Clinic*



A wise man once said, “One’s life is worthwhile as long as one has completed these three tasks: building a home, raising a child, and planting a tree.” For most people, the first task of the American Dream comes true sooner or later. The second task is indeed challenging, but for most is the second part of the American Dream. The third task is the kicker... what could be easier than planting a tree? Here at Top Tropicals, we believe that with the number of trees we have planted, plus the number of trees we have provided for others to plant, cancels out the need for us to complete the first two tasks in order for our lives to be worthwhile! However, believe it or not, it took the death of quite a few trees for us to finally figure out the correct way to do it! Is it easy to plant a tree? Sure it is... as easy as 1-2-3. Here’s how...

Start with a hole

Dig a hole at least two to three times bigger than the pot your tree is currently in. The bigger, the better, as long as the hole is filled with a good quality media. Fill the hole with planting mix almost all the way to the top, leaving the space on top a little shorter than the height of the actual pot.

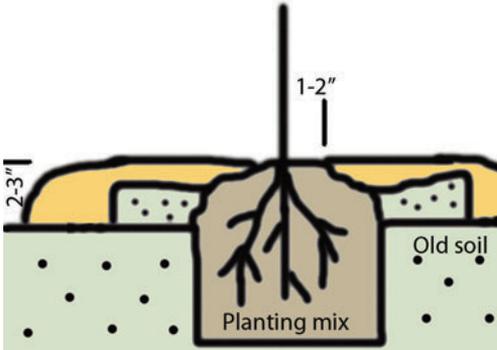
At Top Tropicals, we use organic composted manure for planting fruit trees, gardenias, and most of the plants that require rich organic soil. Depending on the type of soil already in your yard, mixing compost with existing soil in the hole should suffice, as long as the soil does not contain limestone or shells. If the soil in your yard is almost pure sand, clay, etc., you will need to replace it with something better.

Level makes the difference

Carefully remove the plant out of its pot, placing the root ball on top of the

planting mix, and adding more soil around the root ball. Now, here is **the most important part of your planting project: the position of the root ball.**

First, be sure that the growing point (the point where the stem/trunk turns into a root system) stays at the same level, and that no extra soil is put on top of it. The base of the trunk will remain uncovered as it was when the plant was in the pot. **This is of vital importance!** If the root base is suffocated with soil



or mulch, it will most likely cause the root to rot or create mold around the base, risking the plant's life. A trick we find handy is to leave a couple of small weeds around the base of the trunk. The weeds along with particles of perlite



and granulated fertilizer from the original potting mix provide visual control in order to keep the growing point level above the surrounding surface (See image to the left). When the planting is



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completed and proof-checked, these weeds can be cleaned out.

Second, when filling the space around the root ball with a planting mix, be sure to create a little mound, instead of flattening the mix to the same level as the surrounding ground. In addition, add extra planting mix, as needed, beneath the root ball. The elevated position of the growing point is especially important for areas with rainy seasons, when parts of the yard may become flooded. Elevation between one and three inches should suffice, depending on the severity of the flooding conditions. As long as the base of the trunk is above the surrounding surface, the tree will have a greater chance to survive

flooding. Also, keep in mind that the new porous mix will compress with time; after waterings, the tree may begin to sink another half inch to an inch. Very often, even properly planted trees end up being planted too low, because of the potting mix compacting underneath it. However, remember that planting a tree too high is not wise either; this may cause a tree to dry out, since the root system is not well established and the plant has no deep access to water. Some trees are very sensitive to drying out, such as Guava, Lychee, Ylang-Ylang, and Erlichia. Although they require adequate drainage and are somewhat tolerant to dry conditions,

they still require a good amount of water to establish their roots.

Presentation is key

Now that your tree is planted, what do you do with the extra dirt taken out of the ground to make your hole? That's easy... Use it to create a "cone" around your newly planted tree. Put the old soil around the new planting in the shape of a ring; this will create an additional barrier to retain water during the establishing period. Last but not least, dress your tree with some mulch. Mulch will disguise every imperfection of the dirt mound you created.

Important: Leave open a space between one and two inches around the trunk, so that the mulch does not touch the stem. This will provide the tree with necessary air circulation and avoid possible mold or rot problems to the bark.

Finally, it is time to water your plant. Furthermore, soak it! Do not try to water your tree without mulch around it; the water will not hold.

DIY tip:

Poor Man Mulch

After mowing your lawn, save the grass cuttings. Cut grass, or hay, is a

good source of Nitrogen and is the best natural mulch. After a few rains, the compressed hay will block weeds from getting to your plant. And if you'd like, you can always dress up your not so pretty hay with a layer of mulch.

Now that you've completed our crash course on planting a tree, go ahead and try it yourself! If you are successful, you can thank Top Tropicals for helping you complete one-third of life's worthwhile tasks!●

