



Whitemarsh Tree Giveaway

Fall 2025

Community Canopy Project



Trees sourced from TreeAuthority.net

The Tree Authority Nursery exclusively uses Air Pruning bags to reduce circling or girdling roots typical of plants grown in plastic containers. Circling or girdling roots will eventually strangle the trunk as the tree grows. Since there is minimal need to cut the root system when planting, there is minimal transplant shock. Hasan Malik, owner of the Tree Authority, an ISA Certified Arborist, grows his trees so the root flares are visible at soil level. His trees are pruned to be structurally sound throughout the tree's life.

Safety First: Face shovels down on the ground when not in use. Wear gloves as there can be broken glass and sharp objects in the soil. **Call 811 within 10 days of planting** to confirm that there are no underground utilities in your proposed planting area. It's free of charge to homeowners.

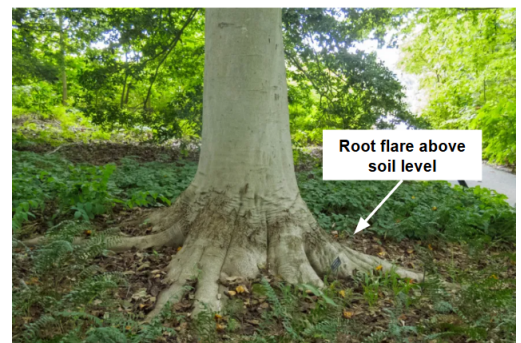
Preparing Hole in Advance:

Dig hole about 2.5' in diameter, 10" deep. Save all dirt and sod on a tarp or plastic bag beside the hole to use for backfilling the hole. Place caution cones nearby, as needed. **Please note:**

- Separate the dirt from the sod to use the dirt for backfilling the hole, as needed.
- Do not include the sod in the hole when backfilling as the decaying grass will form air pockets which can kill the roots.
- The sod can be used, root-side facing up, to create a berm around the tree to hold water.

Planting the tree:

- **Remove bamboo stake:** If there is a bamboo stake bound to the main trunk of the tree, please carefully remove the bands attaching the stake to the tree. Pull the stake upward to dislodge it from the tree.
- **Remove tree from the pot:** Carefully place the tree on the ground on its side, parallel to the ground, so the pot is on its side. Pay attention not to break branches. Press the side of the pot, rotating it on the ground, to loosen the soil from the pot. Hold the tree by its trunk, close to the soil, to pull it from the Air Pruning bag. (**Please return the bag to a collection pen** at the Township Building [616 Germantown Pike, Lafayette Hill 19444], as it can be reused at the nursery.)
- **Check roots:** Lay the tree on its side to massage the root ball with your hands to loosen the soil around the roots. Gently shake the tree to dislodge enough soil to check the root system and the root flare. There should be minimal circling or girdling roots. Splay the roots outward like the spokes of a wheel. There is no need to remove all the soil as long as you can observe the root flare and splay any circling roots.
- **Plant so root flare is above ground.**
 - a. Trees/soil can settle, so tamp the base of the hole with your hands before placing the tree in the hole. **Do not compact the soil.**
 - b. Place the tree in the hole.
 - i. **Plant so the root flare is above the ground, never buried.** Plant the tree slightly high, with the start of the top woody roots (aka "root flare") ~1 inch above the soil surface. All roots should be buried, but the trunk should remain above ground. As needed, adjust the depth and width of your pre-dug hole by adding soil back to the hole, or digging deeper and/or wider.



<https://marylandgrows.umd.edu/2024/01/12/free-the-flare-maintain-visible-root-flare-for-tree-health/>

- ii. Check that the tree is **vertical** from all angles.
- iii. **Splay out the roots to encourage them to grow outward** like the spokes of a wheel, and not to circle the trunk, as those will eventually strangle the tree.
- iv. If some roots do not fit in the hole when splayed outward, **cut a trench for those roots.**
- c. **Fill the hole with the excavated soil, breaking up any large clumps.** Do **not** use any fertilizers or soil additives. Ensure:
 - i. that the tree remains **vertical** from all directions, and
 - ii. that the **root flare remains above the soil level.**
 - iii. **Add water regularly as you backfill with soil, but do not step on or tamp the soil to avoid compaction.**
- **Water:** ~10-15 gallons (or as much as soil will absorb) at planting time. Sufficient water will help the tree establish competent roots.
- **Mulch:** Mulch trees using the 3-3-3 rule (3” deep, 3” away from trunk at soil level, 3’ wide radius, if possible). Mulch helps maintain soil moisture, modulates soil temperature, provides nutrients as it decomposes, represses weed growth, and protects from mower and weed wacker damage to the bark and the root flare.
- **Berm:** Use upside down sod (root side up) to create a circular berm around the mulch ring to hold water.
- **Protect from deer:** If the foliage is in deer browse range (under 5’) place a sturdy welded wire fence around the tree. Deer can easily push their way through weaker chicken wire. When the tree has grown so that the foliage is mostly above deer browse range, replace the fencing with a bark guard to protect the trunk from buck rub. We know fencing is not aesthetically pleasing, but without it, deer will eat the leaves or destroy the bark. Fencing, replaced by a bark guard when sufficiently large, is an absolute necessity!
- **Clean up** the site and stow tools.



These deer protection systems (fence, bark guards) will also protect the tree bark from mowers and weed whackers.

Caring for your young tree:

1. **Water 10 gallons at a time, once per week until the ground freezes.** The roots should develop over the winter.
2. **Resume watering in the spring, continuing until the following fall.** You can stop watering regularly after the tree has been in the ground for two years. **Please water during periods of drought and during heat waves. Water is essential to help establish effective root systems.**
3. Add **mulch twice a year**, making certain that the root flare remains above ground, using the 3-3-3 method. **Mulch serves as a natural fertilizer so additional fertilizer is not recommended.**

For questions or additional information, contact us at communitycanopyproject@gmail.com.