

Plant a Tree in Support of Reconciliation

Orange Shirt Day, now also known across Canada as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a day for education, reflection, and action on Reconciliation. The rediscovery of unmarked graves at former residential schools is a tragic reminder of the terrible legacy of residential schools in Canada.

Planting a tree in support of Orange Shirt Day is a symbolic gesture, much like displaying an orange shirt in your window or porch. Trees begin small and are nurtured to grow, eventually becoming strong and independent. They provide protection from the elements and give us materials like lumber to build our houses and schools. Trees clean the air, provide shade, and create habitat for wildlife. In the autumn, some trees turn a brilliant orange or red. These colours have come to represent our support for residential school survivors (orange) and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (red).

Today you may be planting one of the hundreds of eastern white cedar seedlings being given away by the City of Thunder Bay or you may be choosing to plant another tree. In Anishinaabe culture, cedar is a sacred medicine found on the medicine wheel. It is also symbolic of healing and protection. As you plant your seedling, give some thought to the children in your life – family, friends, neighbours, and the children of our community. This tree will grow with them, and shape them through interactions with nature and natural play. The action of planting a tree today will contribute towards Reconciliation, demonstrating you care about all children – including those who never came home from residential schools and those who came home scarred and marked by it. Planting a tree is a reminder to never forget and remember that every child matters.

How to Plant a Tree

Planting a tree can be easy and engaging, but ensuring your tree lives for decades to come takes a little thought and planning.

Choosing a Location

Find a location where the tree, small now, will have room to grow.

Plant away from buildings and avoid planting under hydro lines.

Do not plant a tree on the boulevard, the area between the sidewalk and street or the first few meters of your front yard. This area is used by the City, so planting in this location is determined by the City Forester.

Avoid costly and dangerous damage to underground infrastructure like phone/internet, water, or gas lines. Remember to call or click before you dig. Visit: www.ontarioonecall.ca

Checking the Drainage

Having the correct amount of water is one of the most important things for new trees. Check your soil drainage by digging a small hole, filling it with water, and keeping track of how long it takes for the water to disappear. If it disappears quickly, you'll have to water more frequently. If the water takes more than a day to drain, your soil holds too much water, and you should consider finding a new location for your tree. Ideally you're looking for a spot which drains moderately over a couple hours.

Planting the Tree

If you have a good location with decent drainage and adequate space, here are the steps to plant the tree:

1. Dig the hole

Dig the hole deep enough for the roots to fit comfortably. This may differ if your tree has a root ball (your tree is potted) or has loose roots (you're planting a bare root tree). One of the most common mistakes is digging the hole too deep.

2. Loosen the roots/Trim the roots

If your tree came with a root ball, gently loosen the dirt and unwrap any roots.

If you have a bare root tree, using sharp scissors or pruning shears, carefully trim any roots that are much longer than the others. Give the roots a 'hair cut' so that they are more or less equal all the way around.

3. Set the tree in the hole

Position the tree so the spot where the trunk meets the root is approximately 2-5 cm (1-2 in) above the existing soil level.

4. Backfill around the roots

Using the soil removed from the hole, backfill around the roots. If your soil is heavy clay or very sandy, you can balance the mixture by adding compost, peat moss, or manure. Take your time, watering once when you're halfway through, allowing the water to drain. Make sure there are no air pockets in the soil as you backfill. Gently press the earth as you backfill around the roots.

5. Apply mulch around the new tree

Add a layer approximately 5-7 cm (2-3 in) of mulch over the area where you removed grass while digging the hole. You can use wood chips, shredded bark, straw, shredded cardboard, a ground cloth, or leaves. This will help hold moisture in the soil and insulate the ground around the tree during the winter.

6. Water regularly

Until the ground freezes, you should water about 2-3 cm (1 in) once per week. Less if your soil has more clay in it, and less often if it rains.

7. Protect the tree

Young trees can be damaged by rodents and during the winter by freezing and thawing. To protect from rodents, place a cut-off empty 2 litre pop bottle or yogurt container around the base. To protect the tree during the winter, build a small 'tent' from scrap wood or wrap the tree with burlap. If your tree is at risk of leaning, use a stake to hold it up straight. A stake can be driven in vertically or on an angle.

Thank you for taking the time to join your neighbours and friends in doing something meaningful for Reconciliation. Learn more about Orange Shirt Day at www.thunderbay.ca/OrangeShirtDay