

Bare root tree planting instructions adapted from:

Urban Horticulture Institute, Department of Horticulture, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

This **Balsam Fir** (*Abies balsamea*) grows to a height of 50' with a spread of around 20' at maturity. Full sun for at least 4 hours per day is best for this tree.

The roots have been dipped in hydrogel to prevent drying. Your tree should be stored in a cool, shaded place until ready to be planted. Your refrigerator is ideal. The sooner you plant, the better — plant it today if you can. You may plant your tree in a pot with potting mix until fall if you wish to protect it and give it a stronger start. If you do postpone planting in the ground until the fall, follow the directions below when you do plant outdoors.

Prune only dead or broken branches. At this stage the tree needs all the potential leaves it can get.

Consider the mature height and spread of your tree when choosing a location. Look up and make sure it will not interfere with any utility wires. Look down and make sure the roots will not interfere with underground utilities, drainage pipes or your sprinkler system. If in doubt, call Dig-Safe (811) to mark your utilities. Plant it far enough from your home and other buildings.

Remove the turf from your chosen site to a diameter of three feet. A rectangular spade is ideal for this job. Grass should be completely removed so it doesn't compete with the newly planted tree for water. This also prevents lawnmower and string trimmer damage to your new tree. Use the removed turf to fill in a bare spot on your lawn or add it to your compost pile.

Dig the planting hole just deep enough so you can spread out the roots without burying the stem. Do not loosen the soil that will be underneath the root system; instead concentrate on creating loose soil horizontally for the spreading roots. The hole should be 2-3 times wider in all directions than the root spread. A hint for loosening soil: use the hole you are digging as a "bowl" to first break up the soil clods, then shovel the loosened soil out. Longmeadow soil is sandy and will not need much loosening.

Remove the tree from the plastic bag and stand it upright in the hole. Plant the tree so that the beginning of the root flare is visible at soil level. It is critical not to plant the tree too deep. Lay your shovel across the hole to see where the shovel meets the root flare and adjust the planting depth accordingly. If you anticipate settling of the soil, plant a little high. It is better to plant too high than too deep.

Check to see that the tree is plumb, then backfill with the native soil that you have removed. Do not use amendments in the planting hole. When you've replaced half of the backfill, water the hole to help collapse air pockets. Finish backfilling, and gently firm soil. Make sure the soil is not mounded against the trunk and that the beginning of the root flare is showing above ground.

Mulch over the entire rooting area with 2-4" of old (not fresh) wood chips or shredded bark mulch. The farther out you mulch, the better. Don't mound the mulch against the tree trunk since this could create a favorable environment for fungi.

Fertilizer is not recommended for newly planted trees and can burn the roots.

Staking is not necessary and can even be detrimental for most young trees. A chicken wire cage is recommended if you anticipate deer or rabbit browsing.

Initial maintenance: Mulch should be maintained at a depth of 2-4". Water twice per week for the first year, weekly in the second year. You can skip a watering if there has been an inch of rain since the last watering. Start training trees one full year after they are planted.

Thank you for improving our suburban forest!

The Longmeadow Tree Committee

For questions about this or other gardening topics, contact the Master Gardeners of Western Massachusetts through their email or phone hotlines at www.wmmga.org

