How to Plant and Grow Your Tree(s)
Step-by-Step Guidance

Getting Started

The saying goes, "right tree, right place, right purpose." Healthy trees are planted in locations where they have space for their roots and canopy; deep, infrequent watering; and protection from lawnmowers, soccer balls, and other impacts. Trees, depending on the species, can grow very large or can be successfully grown in pots or containers in small spaces. It is up to you to make the best decision for your trees based on your conditions. A great overview to read is City Plants Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason   En Espanol: Arbol Correcto, Lugar Correcto, Razon Correcta

Evaluate your space

- Draw a map of your space.
- Estimate the size of areas available.
- Document where overhead wires and underground utilities are located.
- Consider locations in front, back, and sides of your home.

Evaluate your light level

- Is your site full sun, part-shade, or mostly shady.
- Is your primary goal shading your home or area of your yard.

Evaluate water available.

A tree planted in a lawn will need about five (5) gallons of water twice a week for the first year, then weekly for the next two years. Native tree or shrub species may be less, but this is a good rule of thumb to plan.

Determine locations and goals

Trees can provide shade within a few years and live for decades if they are planted where they have plenty of space, water, and appreciation. Start by stepping into your front and back yards and determine where you can plant a tree. Learn from two webpages, https://katestrees.org/where-to-plant-a-tree/ and https://www.cityplants.org/tree-care/.

Do you want trees for food?

Trees can also provide food. Fruit trees, in general, will require more water and care but several species do well in inland North County. Citrus, pomegranates, guavas and other fruit trees are good candidates. Several of these come in dwarf form so they can be planted in pots on balconies and patios.

Do you want to help nature?

Native trees and large shrubs can provide significant shade and support local pollinators and ecology as well. They are adapted to our region so will do well if cared for properly. Check out our Nurture Nature Fact Sheet as well.

Choose which trees and large shrubs you want to plant

Healthy urban trees in our region need to be drought tolerant, sized right for the place they will be planted, and provide shade and other benefits.

1. Choose tree size and foliage. Go to Calscape.org and type in your address. A list of native trees can be found there. You can also check out our list of appropriate trees to plant in inland North County here.
   - Small trees and shrubs like Toyon can be planted in planting space less than 25 feet,
   - Medium trees in planting spaces up to 50 feet,
   - Large trees in planting space greater than 50 feet. Measure your planting space.

2. Check the plant hardiness zone and irrigation requirements.
   - Look up the Western Sunset planting "zone" for your location, in this planting zone map, https://www.sunsetwesterngardencollection.com/climate-zones/zone/san-diego-region
   - Dig in the soil to get a sense of whether you have sand or clay soils. That will influence the irrigation requirements and schedule.

3. List of available and suitable trees at https://katestrees.org/which-tree-to-plant/ . Also a table that lists several dozen tree species suitable for San Diego, and link to trees suitable throughout California at SelectTree. Please choose a California native tree whenever you can to support local animal species.

How to get or buy trees

Please purchase your CA native trees from a local native plant nursery like Moosa Creek or Tree of Life. These websites also have a lot of important and helpful information about each tree species.

Tree Planting Day

The "tree planting day" is the most important day in the life of a tree. If you are planting your own trees please:
- Start by watching videos at https://katestrees.org/how-to-plant-a-tree/
- Review all the steps, in this webpage, https://www.cityplants.org/tree-care/ Carefully follow the steps for planting a tree.
- Gather supplies and dig the holes, at least a day before planting.
- If you have room, loosen soil in a 3 x 5 foot area with your tree in the center. Plant this area with native wildflowers or other low growing native plants. You can also mulch this area and your tree will benefit.
- Mulch, stake, and soak the tree. You can also use rocks or stones about 6 inches from the trunk to help keep the roots cool.

Watering and caring for young trees

- Watch the videos on how to water and mulch trees, at https://katestrees.org/how-to-grow-a-healthy-tree/
- Water your tree twice a week for the first six months, and once a week between six months and two years after you plant.
- View this video about watering young trees, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_kQZriJ38U&t=2s . For this and other trees that are larger and mature, view this video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrirPBMTYi0&t=69s.

Celebrate your trees and put them on the map! San Diego Tree Plotter

Have Questions? Once you get started, please contact us if you have any questions at conservation@sierraclubncg.org
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