VAN DEN BERK NURSERIES

Planting instructions

for planting a tree

1. Digging a planting hole

Dig a large planting hole with a diameter of 1.5 to 2 times the diameter of the root ball; for example, if the tree has a root ball diameter of 60cm, then the planting hole needs to have a diameter of at least 90cm, and preferably 120cm.

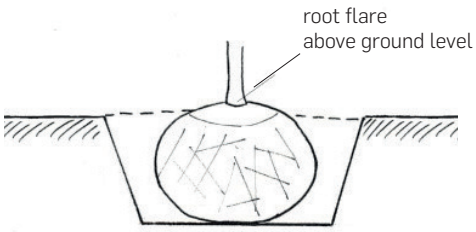
The hole needs to be slightly shallower than the height of the root ball. For the sake of oxygen exchange, the tree must not be planted any deeper than it was in the nursery!

With large trees, bear in mind that the tree will sink due to the weight of the root ball. It can compress the soil beneath, especially if the soil has not yet settled properly, for instance on the sites of new construction projects (Fig.1).

Loosen the base of the planting hole to a spade's depth, and if necessary, break up the sides as well. The digging action can seal the walls of the hole in clay or loamy soils. By breaking them up with a spade, the roots will find it easier to penetrate them.

If you wish, mix new soil with the existing soil. Sometimes people choose to fill the hole with garden soil. Mix that with the existing soil at the bottom of the hole so the roots can radiate out from the planting hole more easily.

1.

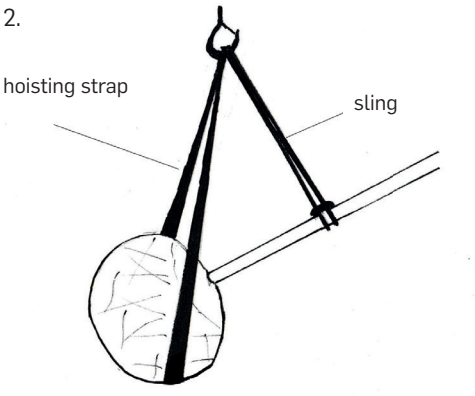


2. Placing a tree in the planting hole

Lift the tree by the root ball. Never lift it by the trunk alone as there is a good chance of damaging the bark. It is preferable to use a hoisting strap for the root ball and support the rest of the tree with a sling tied around the trunk (Figure 2). Place the tree in the center of the planting hole.

Loosen the wire mesh and hessian around the base of the trunk. Fold back the hessian and wire slightly at the top so that they are well away from the trunk, but do not remove them completely! They will rot away of their own accord anyway and removing them can be bad for the root ball because it would risk being split under the tree's weight.

2.



- Do not plant the tree too deep!
- Leave jute and wire mesh in place.

3. Anchoring the tree

A newly planted tree needs to be anchored to prevent it from being blown over. The most common anchoring method involves is using two or three stakes above ground. Two stakes are sufficient for smaller trees, with circumferences of up to 25-30 cm (Figure 3a and 3b).

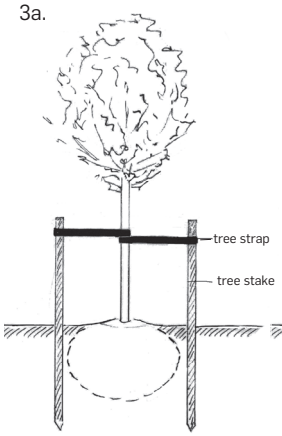
With larger trees, with trunk circumferences of 25-30 cm or more, it is preferable to anchor them with three stakes (Figure 3c and 3d). Choose stakes whose length and thickness match the size of the tree. For clear stem trees, with a free stem height of at least 200 cm, use tree stakes measuring 250 cm. 100 cm goes into the ground and 150 remains above the ground.

Right alongside the root ball, use an auger to drill two or three holes in the ground, either opposite each other or in a triangular formation, and drive the tree stakes firmly into them. At least half of the stakes need to be underground. When using two stakes you need to consider the prevailing wind. In Western-Europe it usualy is a southwesterly. This means you need to place the stakes on the southeast and northwest.

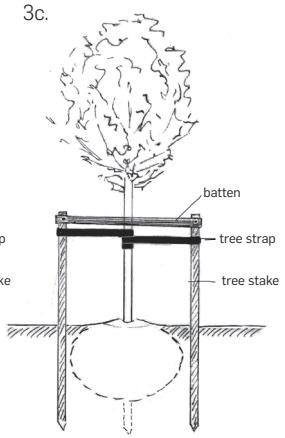
Fill the planting hole with soil. Encourage soil life by mixing an organic soil improver or well-rotted compost into the soil.
As you do so, stamp the soil down well. Link together the tops of the three tree stakes with horizontal battens to create a sturdy structure. If you're using two stakes, this is won't be necessary.

Place tree straps around the trunk and nail each one to a tree stake. The tree straps must neither be loose nor under tension. After about three years, the tree stakes will have rotted and you can take them out entirely or just remove the sections above the ground. The tree will have established itself enough to be able to continue growing without support.

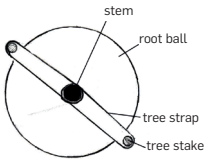
3a.



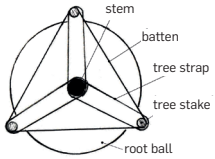
3c.



3b.
top view



3d.
top view



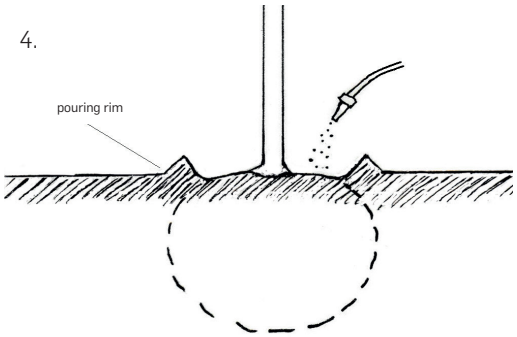
4. Apply a pouring rim

Newly planted trees need to be given extra water for at least the first two years. The amount given depends on the weather and the type of tree. Use a pouring rim made of soil or plastic to ensure that water reaches well into the root ball. The diameter of the pouring rim should be the same as that of the root ball so the water can be absorbed by the whole root ball (Figure 5).

In dry weather, check the moisture levels alongside the root ball once a week and water as needed. When the tree needs water, give it a large amount at once rather than a little every day. Check the soil moisture with a gouge or by pushing a shovel into the ground.

Keep the root balls moist but not soaking wet throughout the growing season. Trees can die from overwatering too because this causes a lack of oxygen in the soil and the roots will rot. Besides pouring rims, there are other methods of watering trees. Visit www.vdberk.com/advice for more information.

4.



Advice: pruning after planting

It is advisable to prune trees lightly immediately after or immediately before planting. By 'shearing' the tree and removing pieces of the top shoots, the balance between crown and root ball is restored and the tree will grow better in its new location.

Pruning may be required if there is a sudden leaf fall or drooping foliage in dry summers. If this occurs even though the soil has been kept adequately moist, it is usually due to the root system's lack of water transport ability. Pruning helps the tree because it reduces evaporation through the leaves, which then reduces the need for the roots to supply water.

After the tree has become established and continues to grow well, pruning is generally no longer necessary. It is best to cut dead branches from the tree, while you can use your own judgment to remove any branches that may be causing a nuisance. For the most natural effect, cut away the entire branch at the trunk. Leave about 1 cm of the branch on the trunk so the pruning wound does not become unnecessarily large, but don't leave any 'coat pegs' in place.

Note: Acer (maple), Betula (birch) and Juglans (walnut) are vulnerable to 'bleeding'. Never prune these trees during the months of February to May. Wait until afterwards. In early spring, the sap starts to rise again in the trees and when they are pruned it continues to flow from the wounds, which means they could literally bleed to death.