

LEARN ABOUT FORESTS

We all depend on trees and forests! Use this fun, hands-on activity to engage youth in learning about sustainable forest management. It's perfect for educational events, career days, or field visits.



PLANT A TREE

PLAN

KEY CONCEPT: As part of the forest ecosystem, trees have various roles. These roles include supplying oxygen, producing food, providing habitat for many species of wildlife, stabilizing soil, moderating temperature, capturing and storing carbon, and cycling water and nutrients. [PLT Canada's Forest Literacy Framework, Concept 1.B.6]

OBJECTIVES: Provide opportunities for learners to

- Identify benefits we receive from trees.
- Participate in a tree-planting event.
- Learn how to care for trees.

SESSION TIME: 50 minutes for tree planting

SETTING: Outdoors



BACKGROUND

Trees are invaluable assets. They

- Store carbon, helping to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide and fight climate change
- Hold soil with roots, preventing erosion
- Provide homes and food for birds and other animals
- Serve as a windbreak, keeping buildings warmer
- Provide shade, keeping buildings cooler
- Provide beauty and enjoyment and improve our overall health
- Provide forest products such as firewood, boards, mulch, and others.

Planting trees in neighborhoods and around schools improves the landscape and health of the environment for the duration of the trees' lives. In addition, research shows that the act of tree planting itself helps people develop a sense of inner pride and encourages positive behavior. Planting a tree is a long-term investment that requires careful planning. To ensure that a tree lives a long life, it should be the right tree species for the location, and it should be planted in a suitable place. The tree must be cared for at the time of planting and for several years afterward. With a healthy start and proper ongoing care, a tree may live decades or even hundreds of years.

PREPARE

MATERIALS: Native sapling or seedling, shovel, mulch, watering hose or watering can, recycled paper, yarn or string, pens.

GET READY: We suggest that this experience be planned in collaboration with the group's teacher or youth group leader, perhaps around Earth Day or other event. You may want to plan two sessions with the group: one for planning the site and selecting tree species, and one for actually planting the trees.

In advance of the tree planting, you or the teacher should engage learners in identifying a location that will allow plenty of room for the tree's roots to grow and that is away from buildings and power lines. Before digging, call your Province or Territory's call-before-you-dig number or go to your province's/territories [811 website](#) to request that any underground utilities be marked so you can avoid them.

The learners should also help to research and select a tree suitable for your local climate and the chosen location. See PLT Canada's Family Activity "What Tree Should I Plant?" for more information.

BENEFITS OF FORESTS

Planting trees around a house can provide shade and cooling effects in the summer, saving money and reducing electricity use. Planting evergreen trees on the north and west sides of a house can also serve as a windbreak and prevent heat loss in the winter.





LEAD

INTRODUCE:

Lead a discussion about trees, asking students questions such as: What do you like about trees? How do trees help us? What is your favorite tree? How can we help the world by planting trees?

EXPERIENCE:

1. Involve learners in planting a tree. As they help you prepare the site for planting, keep the tree cool and shaded. Try not to handle the exposed roots during planting, and keep them moist.
2. If you're planting a sapling [with a trunk 2.5–10 cm (1–4 inches) in diameter], invite learners to
 - Dig a hole twice as wide and as deep as the root ball. (You may want to show them a bowl to give them a sense of what the hole should look like: wider on top and not too deep.)
 - Build a mound of soil in the hole and place the sapling on top of the mound so that it is 5 cm (2 inches) above the hole's bottom.
 - If the roots are wrapped, remove the burlap and loosen them somewhat.
 - Fill the hole with soil, tamping it down with your foot and wetting it with water.
 - Soak the soil around the tree with water to encourage deep rooting.
3. If you're planting a seedling [with a trunk less than 2.5 cm (1 inch) in diameter], invite learners to
 - Dig a hole a little deeper than the roots are long.
 - Fill the hole around the seedling with dirt.
 - Gently pull the trunk of the seedling up slightly to straighten the roots. Tamp the soil firmly, but not too tightly, or the roots won't be able to collect appropriate amounts of water and nutrients.
 - Soak the soil around the tree with water to encourage deep rooting.

CONNECT:

Lead a discussion about what the tree will need to grow healthy and strong. Point out that a tree is most vulnerable during the first years of its life, and during this time it requires particular care. Challenge learners to develop a plan for caring for the tree, including

- Watering as appropriate for the tree type.
- Adding a 8 to 10 cm (3- to 4-inch) layer of mulch around the base of the tree to keep the soil moist (mulch should not touch trunk).
- Protecting it from pests and animals (maybe putting a mesh tree guard around it to keep animals from chewing the bark).

CLOSE

Invite learners to write a wish for the tree on pieces of recycled paper that they tie to the tree or bury in the soil.



TAKE ACTION

After a tree is planted, the most important aspect of care is to ensure that it receives plenty of water. Challenge students to design a catchment or irrigation system to ensure that a tree receives the water it needs.