



Sapling in the City

THE DENVER RESIDENT'S GUIDE
TO RAISING A HAPPY & HEALTHY TREE
IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT



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"Many people, other than the authors, contribute to the making of a book, from the first person who had the bright idea of alphabetic writing through the inventor of movable type to the lumberjacks who felled the trees that were pulped for its printing. It is not customary to acknowledge the trees themselves, though their commitment is total."

— Rada and Forsyth, *Machine Learning*

Congratulations on Your New Tree!

FOR MANY URBAN DWELLERS, planting and caring for a young tree in the middle of the city is a rather daunting task. Fear not tree parent! Raising a happy and healthy urban tree is actually a simple activity. It doesn't take a lot of time, yet provides countless benefits to you and your community. And *you* can do it!

In the following pages, you'll learn more about:

- The important role of trees in our city.
- What our trees are up to, and how we can help them do it.
- The simple skills required for effective tree parenting
- Where you can find additional support when you need it

So grab your shovel and a hose, it's time to get growing!



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A Forest for the City?

HOW TREES BECAME IMPORTANT MEMBERS
OF THE DENVER COMMUNITY

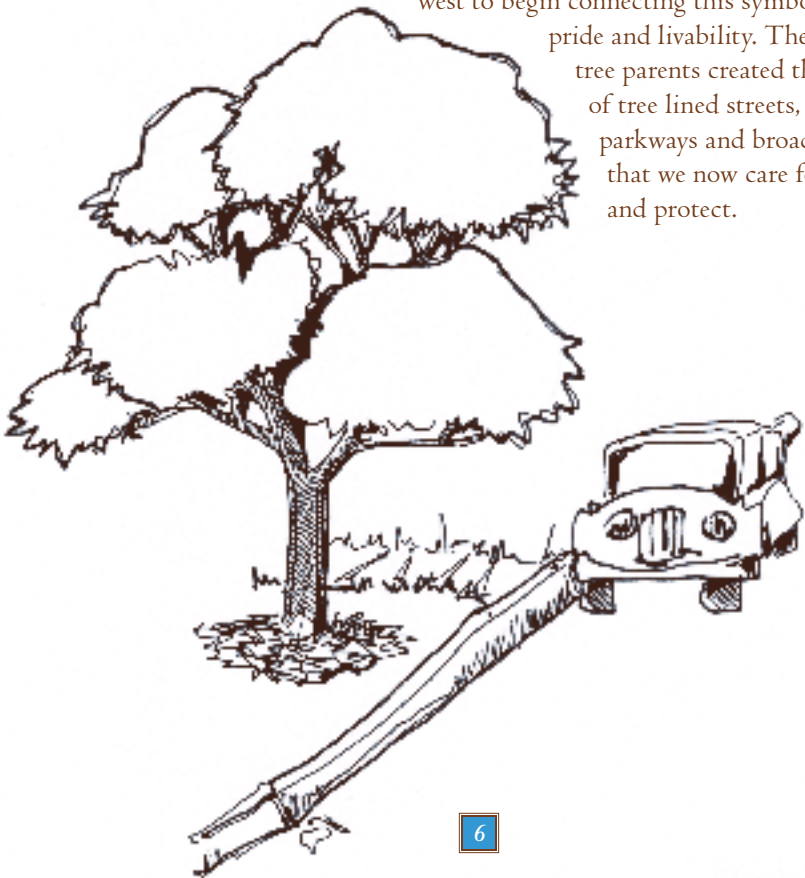
Denver's Urban Forest History

TREES ARE TRULY AN INTEGRAL PART of the Denver landscape. As they silently grow skyward and stretch their branches out over our heads, they create an ever-shifting blanket of leaves that shade our beautiful city and makes it a nicer place to live. Most of us have become so accustomed to the benefits our tall green neighbors provide that we take for granted that they've always been natural members of our community. However, their story is not that simple.

DENVER'S POSITION BETWEEN MOUNTAIN AND PLAIN puts it right in the middle of a habitat that does not characteristically support dense tree growth. (Think of the rather treeless landscape that defines our eastern border.) As the first buildings took shape in our early downtown, and as homes sprang up in the surrounding area, life got a bit hot and dusty. Residents who hailed from forested areas realized that the solution to this issue was a simple one — plant trees!

IN 1867, DENVER CITIZENS BEGAN PLANTING STREET TREES at the onset of the completion of the City Ditch. Wagon trains full of cottonwood trees headed west to begin connecting this symbol of civic

pride and livability. These early tree parents created the legacy of tree lined streets, green parkways and broad parks that we now care for, renew and protect.



CIVIC PRIDE AND UNITY presided in all the early settlers, but none had more pride than Mayor Speer. During his three terms in office, Mayor Speer made Arbor Day a major city event. In 1905, he kicked off an annual tree give-away program for Denver residents. Ultimately, this program distributed 110,000 trees to citizens who in turn planted these trees in their yards and especially in the parking strip in front of their houses. Their efforts provided us with the towering giants that now reign over our parks, and arch protectively over our crowded streets, and our homes.

OVER FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, a group of Denver residents decided it was time to bring the “affordable trees to citizens” idea back. Through their efforts, the Denver Digs Trees program came to life. Since that point in time, we’ve distributed over 26,000 trees for planting throughout Denver. And thanks to the tireless efforts of hundreds of dedicated volunteers, and the commitment of residents like you, we look forward to distributing thousands more every year!

Working together, we can all ensure that our tree legacy continues to grow into the future, and throughout every neighborhood in Denver.



Shady Characters Make Great Neighbors

TREE PARENT BENEFITS

INCREASE PROPERTY VALUES: According to the USDA, well-placed and properly cared for trees return the favor by boosting your property's value by 10% to 20%. They're also quick to attract new parents, meaning your house will sell more quickly when they're around.

CUT ENERGY COSTS: As they grow, trees provide increasing amounts of shade, protecting your high-altitude home from the sun's harsh summer rays. A study done in 2001 found that tree-shaded homeowners in the Front Range spend, on average, \$50 less per year on air conditioning.

When colder weather arrives, thoughtfully placed evergreen trees will defend your home from winter winds, reducing the amount of energy required to keep your home cozy.

MAKE YOUR HOME A NICER PLACE TO BE, INSIDE AND OUT! From an outsider's perspective, there's no denying that trees add beauty and character to your home. However, they also enhance the indoor experience by filtering light, beautifying views, and turning street noise away before it invades your living space.



NEIGHBORHOOD BENEFITS:

BRINGING NEIGHBORS TOGETHER: In 1998, a study done by the University of Illinois indicated that green spaces and trees encourage urban dwellers to emerge from their homes more often. More time outdoors naturally led to more time spent around neighbors, and ultimately the development of stronger social ties!

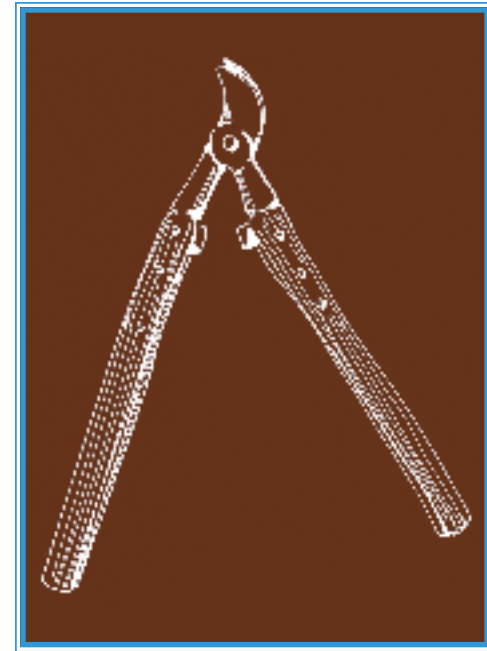
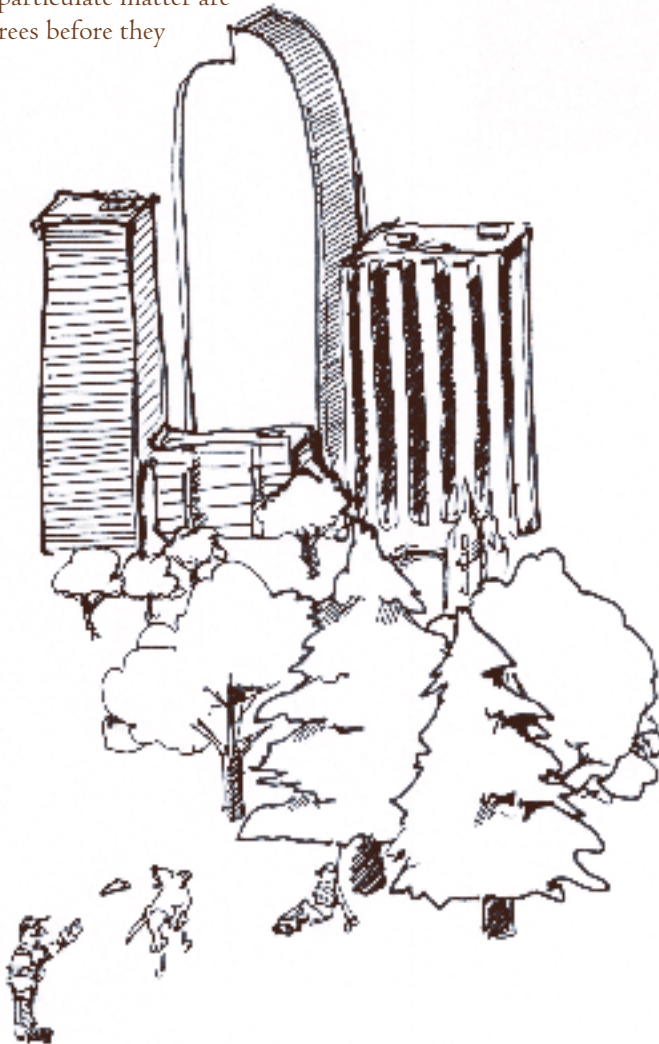
REDUCE CRIME: Despite all of the benefits, life in the city has its challenges. Crowding, high temperatures, and noise can stress us out, wear us down, and even drive some to violent behavior. A study done in Chicago in 2001 found that exposure to trees and green areas can mitigate the stresses of city life, and ultimately reduce levels of aggression and crime!

LEND A HELPING BRANCH TO SHORTER NEIGHBORS: Trees are the hotels, grocery stores, and bedding supply stores for countless critters, including songbirds, squirrels, bats, insects, and others. These critters provide hours of enjoyment for urban naturalists, and are vital contributors to the health of Denver's green areas.

CITYWIDE BENEFITS

STORM WATER WRANGLING: With branches and leaves extended, trees intercept rainwater on its path to the ground. By providing the drops with a good home (in leaves or the soil below), trees keep rainwater off the streets, saving Northern Front Range taxpayers around \$3.2 million on storm water management every year.

PROTECTING OUR LUNGS: As trees go about their daily business, they quietly protect us from a variety of pollutants that could otherwise end up in our bodies. In the Northern Front Range, 2.2 million pounds of carbon monoxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter are captured and detained by trees before they can assault our lungs.



Young Tree Care

GETTING IN TOUCH
WITH YOUR TREES' NEEDS

Over-Arching Tree Care Concepts

A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AS A NEW TREE PARENT

LIFE IN THE CITY IS TOUGH FOR A TREE! Urban trees live much more stressful lives than their countryside counterparts. The unique challenges they face include:

- Extreme temperature variations, due to Denver's wildly unpredictable climate, paved surfaces and other hardscape features
- Compacted, nutrient-poor soils
- Disrupted drainage patterns
- Leaf-coating, pore-clogging pollution

TREES ARE SENSITIVE SOULS: Don't let their tough exteriors fool you. Like us, urban trees are living things. And just like us, they have needs to meet in order to live happy and healthy lives. As urban environments generally don't provide everything a growing tree needs (and as trees can't go in search of what they need), they depend a lot on their human caretakers — especially during the first three years of life.

TREES' NEEDS CHANGE THROUGH THEIR LIFETIME: Just like us, trees have different needs, depending upon how old they are:

- Establishment: Your Tree's "Childhood" (the first 3 years). Young trees require a lot of attention to get them growing on the right path. A little bit of thoughtfulness and extra care, applied at just the right time, can make all the difference in the life of a young tree as it struggles to lay its roots.
- Growth and Structure: Your Tree's "Adolescence" (the next 5 to 10 years). With a strong foundation of healthy roots, your tree will continue to grow skyward. At this point in its life, your tree's eagerness to grow may

overcome its better judgment regarding direction. Providing solid guidance through careful pruning will support your young tree as it works hard to graduate into adulthood.



- Maturity: Your Tree's "Adulthood" (the next 20 to 60 years, depending upon species). Once trees have established themselves as members in good-standing of Denver's urban forest, their growth slows significantly. At this point in life, your tree will be able to provide for most of its own needs, but will still need a little help from you here and there.

TREES' NEEDS ALSO CHANGE THROUGH THE SEASONS: It may look calm and mild-mannered, but your tree is a party animal! At any given point in the year, depending on the season, your tree is either hard at work preparing for a party, actively hosting one, or taking a breather until the festivities begin again.

Trees are well-equipped to play the part of nature's host. However, coordinating events of this size of this size is no easy task. So keep in mind, as the seasons wind by, that some thoughtful assistance from your end could make a huge difference in the success of your tree's efforts!

Check out the following pages to learn more about your tree's seasonal habits, and the simple things you can do to set your tree up for success through the year.



A Year in the Life of a Tree

SPRING

AS WINTER SNOWS MELT INTO THE GROUND, and the warmth of the afternoon sun persists into the evening, city dwellers slowly emerge from the fog of winter dormancy. For Denver's trees, the arrival of the balmy days of Spring means it's time to get to work. There's food to be made and guests to prepare for!

TREES ARE GREAT CULINARY MASTERS, who have perfected the art of preparing their favorite dish: sugar! While humans generally think of sugar as a single ingredient that can be purchased by the bag at the market, trees view it as a complete dish that's best made from scratch.

Trees are perfectly equipped to cook up their meal of choice. Leaves work well as mixing bowls and baking dishes, where green-tinted chlorophyll chops water molecules under the light of the hot sun. Chopped water is mixed with just the right amount of carbon dioxide to create the finished product.

As the cooking is done, scraps of water and oxygen are thrown out, and happily snapped up by those of us who are waiting nearby — whether we realize it or not!

IN SPRING, your tree is busy getting food-production and reproductive equipment ready. Protective buds along the branches swell, and eventually burst open, revealing the bud of a new flower, or a tender young leaf. Roots are sent out in new directions to find water and nutrients, while trunk and branches get busy with the job of moving important ingredients to where they're needed.

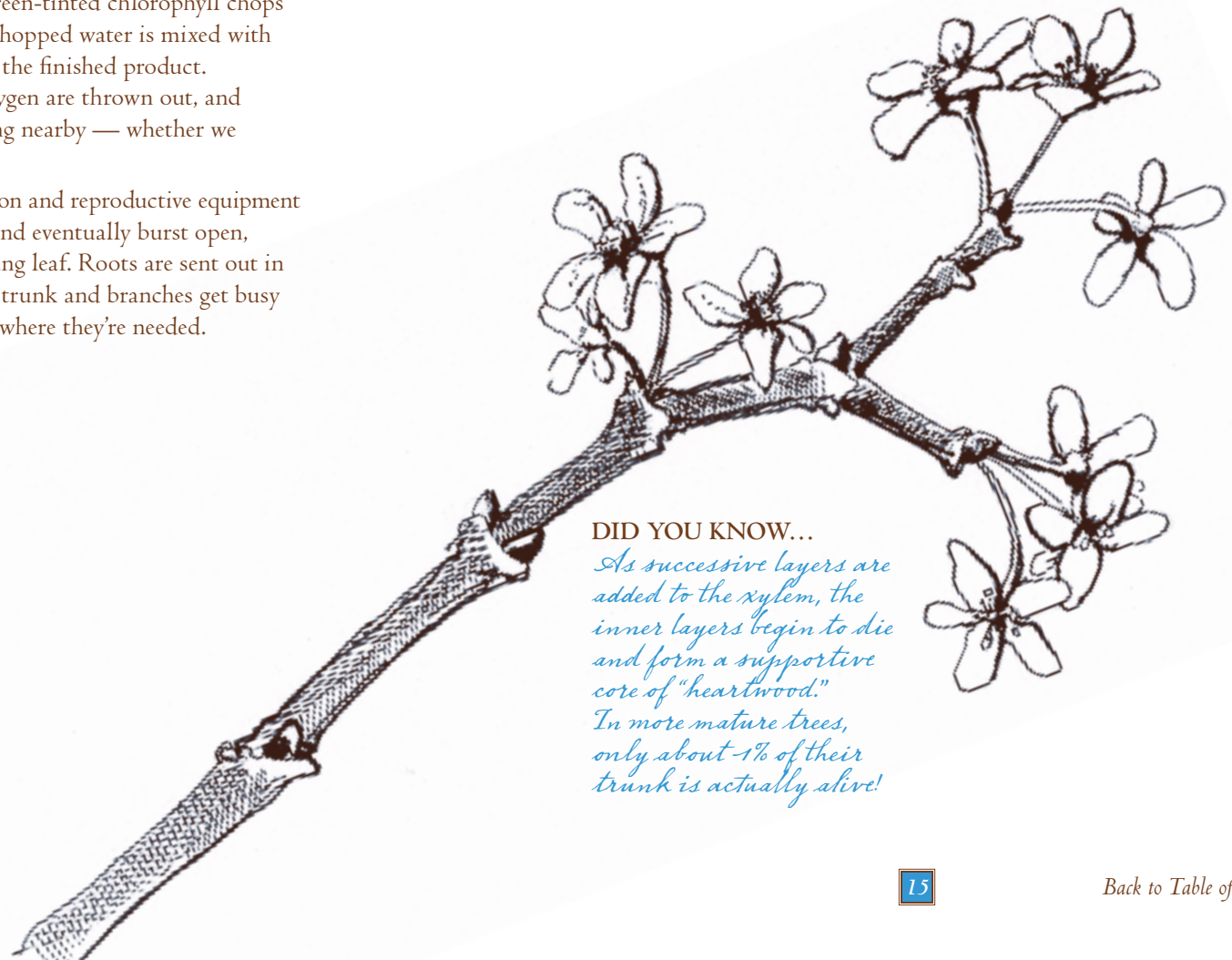
Interview With a Tree: Part One

WHY DO YOU HAVE RINGS IN YOUR TRUNK?

"INSIDE OF MY TOUGH, PROTECTIVE LAYER OF BARK, I am wrapped in two spongy layers of tube-like structures that transport what I need to where I need it.

Just inside of my bark is my *phloem*. My phloem transports my culinary specialty (sugars of course), from my leaves down to the rest of me, including my roots.

Inside of the phloem is my *xylem*. This useful structure transports mineral-rich water up from my roots to my leaves, to be used as a main ingredient in my favorite recipe. Every year I add on to this layer forming the ring pattern you're familiar with."



DID YOU KNOW...

As successive layers are added to the xylem, the inner layers begin to die and form a supportive core of "heartwood." In more mature trees, only about 1% of their trunk is actually alive!

A Year in the Life of a Tree

SUMMER

AS THE DAYS GROW LONGER, and the sun's blazing heat bakes the cityscape, most of us city dwellers slow down and kick back in the shade with a cold beverage. For Denver's trees, however, summertime is party time, and they're working hard under the scorching sun to ensure that all of their guests are enjoying themselves.

HOSTING DUTIES COME NATURALLY TO TREES. Their arching canopy extends overhead to provide a cool, comfortable environment for their guests, while a buffet of fruits, nuts, and leaves is served on every branch. And despite the frenzy of activity going on inside, from leaf tip to root, trees never fail to present a calm and cool exterior to the rest of the world.

Trees have varying interests in hosting others, depending upon their variety. Hawthorns, with their spiky arsenal, are happy to provide shade, but demand some personal space as well. Other varieties, like Oaks, provide shade, plenty of places to sit and rest, and sufficient snacks to provide for their own needs, as well as others'.

THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER, your tree will toil endlessly, cooking up batch after batch of nutritious sugars. Although many of the fruits of its labor may go towards satisfying guests' desires, most of the finished product will be used immediately to provide for your tree's own needs, like growth and reproduction. Leftovers will be stored as starch in roots and other safe places, to be consumed at a later date.

DID YOU KNOW...

The buds located at the end of a tree's branches may be small, but they're still in charge. The hormones they release control everything from growth to seed production.

Interview With a Tree: Part Two

HOW DO YOU GROW LARGER?

"MY TRUNK AND BRANCHES GROW WIDER courtesy of a thin layer of tissue squeezed between my xylem and my phloem. This important layer is called my *cambium* and it wraps around me from my twigs to my roots. Every growing season, my cambium adds another layer to my inner xylem and recreates my outer phloem. It makes me feel like a whole new tree.

My branches grow longer by a sort of yoga-like reaching and stretching I do every year from the buds at their tips."



A Year in the Life of a Tree

AUTUMN

AS THE DAYS SHORTEN and cooler evenings move in to provide a welcome break from summer's scorching afternoons, life in the city breathes a sigh of relief. At this point in the year, Denver's trees gradually devote less time to their frantic cooking and hosting schedules and more time to preparing for a long and well-deserved rest.

DENVER'S TREES MAY LIKE TO PARTY, but they also recognize the importance of living a balanced life. They work hard for the summer's festivities, but aren't afraid to schedule some downtime for rest and relaxation. As the party winds down, guests are shown to the door, bellies full and bodies well-rested, leaving their hosts with plenty of time to clean up and put things away. Used equipment and supplies aren't allowed to pile up, but are packaged and stored, or tossed out into nature's recycling bin.

THROUGHOUT THE FALL, your tree will be busy preparing for the cold months ahead. Chlorophyll's slow disappearance will bring a halt to food production, slowing down growth and reproductive efforts. Broad leaves, whose sun-catching properties are no longer required, will be sealed off from branches, and slowly drift downward, one-by-one, to rest on the soil below.

Fruit and nuts, now full, round and bursting with nutritious energy, will be released to the ground. Lingering guests will gather them from where they lay, to be enjoyed as an afternoon snack, or stored away for colder months. Hopefully these critters will pay for the meal by distributing the seeds within to a good location for a young tree to start its life.

DID YOU KNOW...

The cottonwood's fluffy seed, which is transported from its parent by the winds, can stay airborne for several days!



Interview with a Tree: Part Three

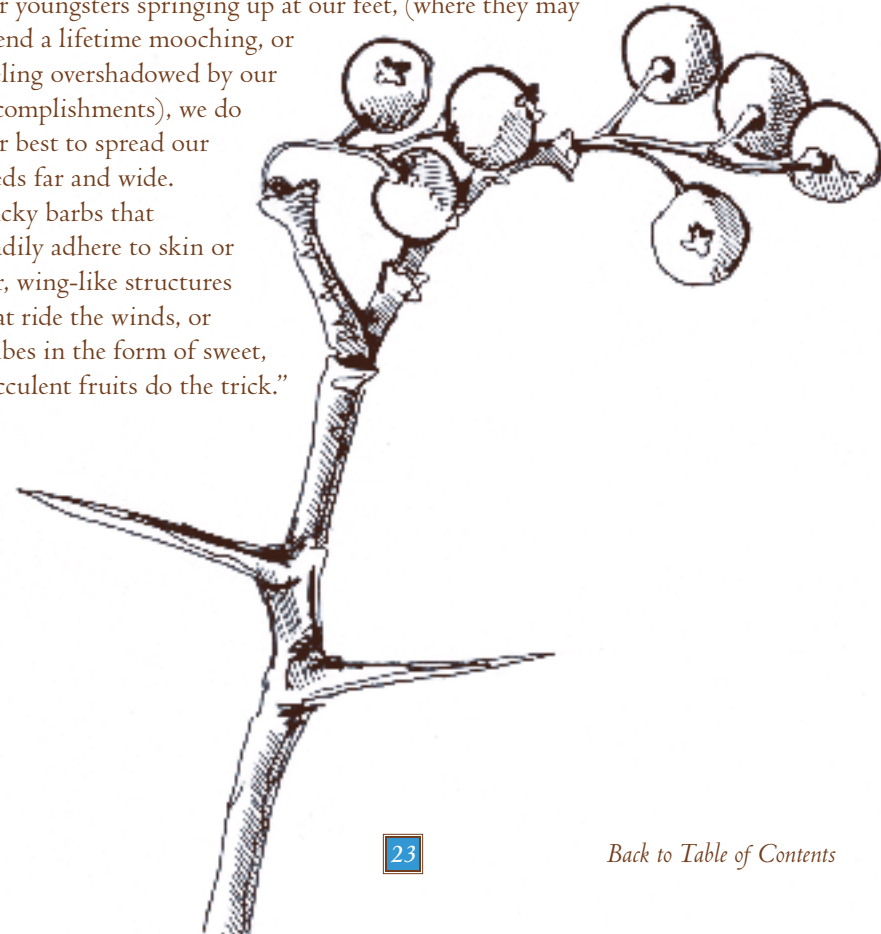
WITHOUT, AHM, GETTING TOO PERSONAL, HOW DO YOU REPRODUCE?

"MY LOVE LIFE consists of long-distance relationships, flowers and sweet snacks, and a little help from the birds and the bees.

Rooted in place as I am, I don't often meet other eligible singles. That doesn't mean that romance isn't in the cards, however. The first step is offering flowers. All of us trees create some sort of flower, from the green cat-tail-like "catkins" of the oaks, to the fragrant blossoms of the cherries.

We use these flowers to "put out the vibe," (the "vibe," of course, being millions of grains of pollen). Some of us stick to the old-school habit of letting the wind spread the word to interested parties, while others opt for the more forward approach of recruiting flying critters to do their talking.

Once our flowers have been fertilized by the pollen of a long-distance lover, we put together precious packages called seeds. As we don't want our youngsters springing up at our feet, (where they may spend a lifetime mooching, or feeling overshadowed by our accomplishments), we do our best to spread our seeds far and wide. Sticky barbs that readily adhere to skin or fur, wing-like structures that ride the winds, or bribes in the form of sweet, succulent fruits do the trick."



A Year in the Life of a Tree

WINTER

AS THE YEAR WINDS DOWN, and freezing temperatures grip the city, most of us reach for a layer of fleece or down, or snuggle into a cozy space with a fluffy blanket. For Denver's trees however, escape from the bitter cold and snowy drifts is not an option. Survival requires a tough exterior, extremely limited activity, and the hope contained deep within buds that lie dormant within the branches.

DENVER'S TREES know how to do downtime. They invite a few of their dearest friends over, keep a plentiful supply of the basic necessities close by, and reduce their activity to a near standstill. Although their growth does not come to a complete halt, little overall effort is required at this time of the year. They survive on leftovers — extra sugars they skillfully prepared and stored away during the hectic days of spring and summer. Roots lie almost dormant in the frozen soil, awakening only occasionally to pull water from temporarily softened soil on the warmest afternoons.

DURING THE WINTER MONTHS, your tree will be hunkered down and taking it easy. To survive these challenging times it not only needs to withstand frigid temperatures, but also the constant risk of water loss. As leaves regularly release water vapor into the surrounding atmosphere, their presence is not missed. A protective corky layer covers the spot where a leaf was once attached, protecting the tree even further from water loss.



Interview with a Tree: Part Four

WHY DO YOU SHED YOUR LEAVES FOR THE WINTER?

“WHEN THE TEMPERATURE DROPS below freezing, my roots are unable to pull any water out of the hardened soil. With my supply cut off, I have to be careful to conserve what I've got! My leaves, which are covered in tiny holes called *stomata*, release a lot of water from inside of me to the air around me. By dropping them to the ground for recycling, I can prevent this loss of water during the time I need to hang on to it most.”

DID YOU KNOW...
Evergreen “needles” are actually long, thin leaves! Their waxy coating protects the tree from water loss, so there's no need to drop them for the winter.

Planting

WHY IT'S WORTH YOUR TIME: Planting technique can make or break a tree's chances for success. Putting extra thought and effort into planting your tree properly will greatly increase the likelihood that your tree will survive and thrive.

What you'll need:

- Shovel
- Hose & water

You may also need:

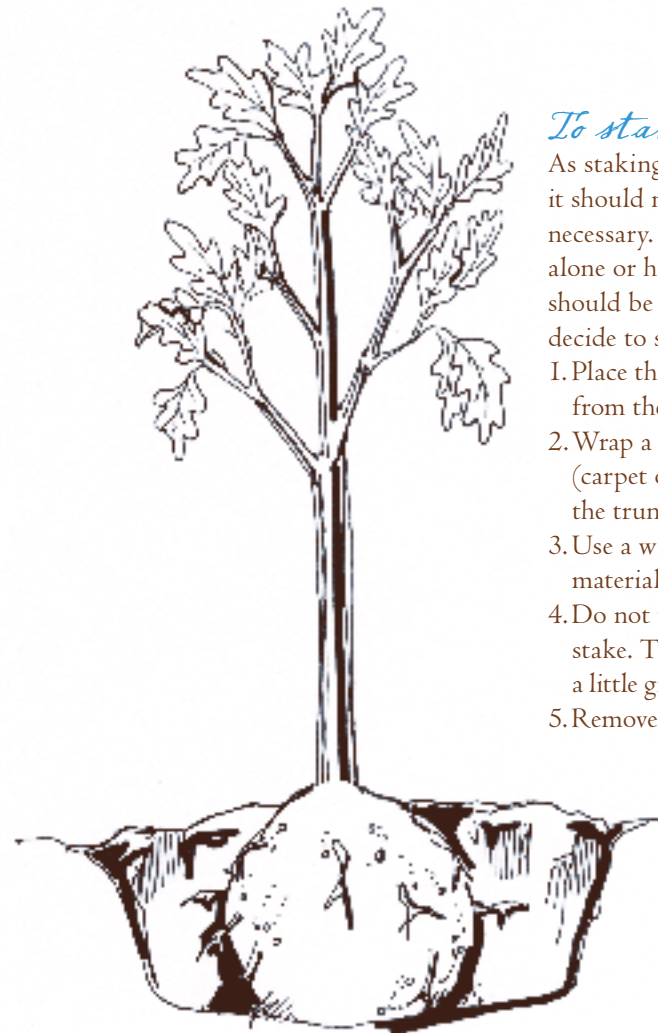
- Wire cutters
- Staking supplies (piece of soft material such as fabric or burlap, wire or rope, stake)

How to do it:

1. Dig a hole of the following size:
 - a. Depth = same depth as root ball
 - b. Width = 12 to 20 inches wider than the diameter of the root ball
2. Remove any grass that will be within three feet of the tree's base.
3. Break up any clods in the soil you removed from the hole – you'll need it to fill in around the tree's roots.
4. Prepare your tree for planting. If it's...
 - a. In a container: remove the container and loosen up bound root balls.
 - b. Balled and burlapped: cut and remove the twine, wire, or other binding material. Leave the burlap in place for now.
5. Place your tree in the hole.
 - a. Make sure that the *crown* of the trunk (the flared area where the trunk meets the roots), is 2 inches above the surrounding soil.
 - b. If your tree is balled and burlapped, remove the top half of the burlap and leave the rest in place.
6. Partially fill the hole and *lightly* pack the soil around the roots. Add lots of water to settle the soil.
7. Completely fill the hole with the rest of the soil and water thoroughly. *Do not pack down the soil.* (If your tree is in an area without irrigation or sprinklers, use leftover soil to form a small circular dike just beyond the rim of the hole to keep the water close to your tree.)
8. Wait several hours after watering, then add soil to bring the level even with the surrounding soil, if necessary.
9. Last but not least, apply a layer of mulch. (See page 36.)

Advice from the pros:

- More young trees die from being planted too deeply than any other cause. Be careful to keep the crown above ground level!
- Before planting a bare-root tree, feel free to cut lone extended roots back to the length of the others. Don't get too crazy with the trimming though — keep the root ball at least 36 inches in width.
- When planting a balled and burlapped tree, make sure the soil at the bottom of the hole is well packed. This will keep your tree from sinking after you plant it.



To stake or not to stake?

As staking a tree can damage the bark, it should not be done unless absolutely necessary. If a tree is too tall to stand alone or has a weak root system, it should be staked very carefully. If you decide to stake...

1. Place the stake in the ground 12 inches from the trunk.
2. Wrap a broad, soft piece of material, (carpet or canvas works fine), around the trunk, below the midpoint.
3. Use a wire or a rope to attach the material to the stake.
4. Do not tie the tree too tightly to the stake. The tree will grow stronger with a little give.
5. Remove staking after one year.

Watering

WHY IT'S WORTH YOUR TIME: Denver's dry climate may not always shower your tree with as much water as it needs. Throwing a few extra gallons its way here and there will enable your tree to keep up with food production and growth, and develop a strong root system. *Next to planting, watering properly is the second most important thing you can do to help your tree survive.*

What you'll need:

A hose or other watering device, such as a deep root fork or needle, soaker hose, or soft spray wand.

How to do it:

- Check to see if your soil actually needs water: Dig up soil from 6 to 10 inches below the surface, and rub it between your fingers.
- If it doesn't stick together, it needs water.
- If it does stick together, resist the urge to water, as over-watering can kill your tree.

Advice from the pros:

- When watering your tree, it's important to soak the ground to a depth of at least 12 inches. (This will encourage your tree to develop a deep and healthy root system, versus a shallow and fragile one.) If using a root watering device, insert it no deeper than 8 inches into the soil.
- As far as the amount of water and how often, opinions vary. Denver Water recommends applying 10 gallons of water for each inch of the tree's diameter.
- Remember that watering schedules should only serve as guidelines! Checking the dampness of the soil around the root ball regularly is the only truly reliable way to determine if your tree needs to be watered.



Mulching

WHY IT'S WORTH YOUR TIME: Think of mulch as a protector of your young tree, your money, and your time. A thoughtfully applied layer of mulch will:

- Protect your tree from damage by lawnmowers and trimmers.
- Save water by slowing evaporation from the soil, and keeping the water where the tree needs it most.
- Control weed growth so you don't have to.

What you'll need:

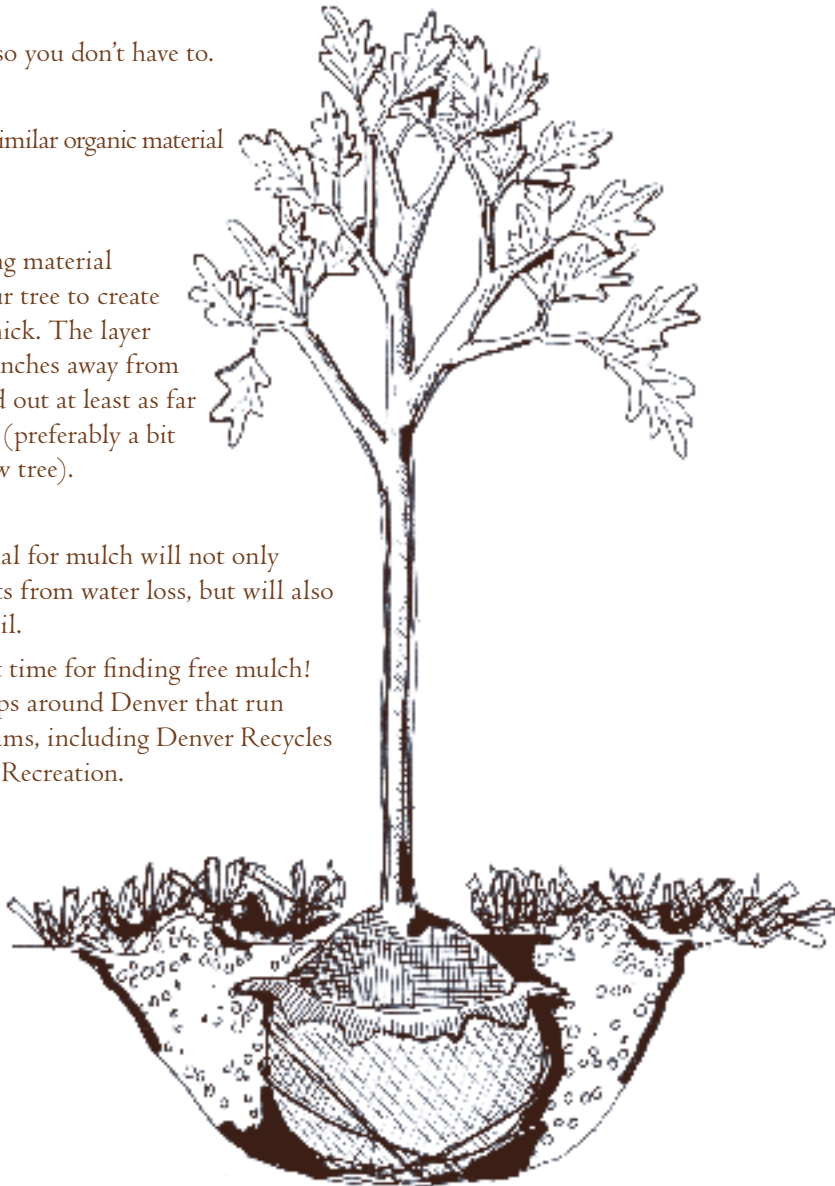
Wood or bark chips or similar organic material
Shovel/Rake

How to do it:

Apply enough mulching material around the base of your tree to create a layer 2 to 3 inches thick. The layer should begin about 6 inches away from your trunk, and extend out at least as far as your tree's branches (preferably a bit further for a brand new tree).

Advice from the pros:

- Using a natural material for mulch will not only protect your tree's roots from water loss, but will also add nutrients to the soil.
- Springtime is the right time for finding free mulch! There are several groups around Denver that run mulch giveaway programs, including Denver Recycles and Denver Parks and Recreation.



Pruning

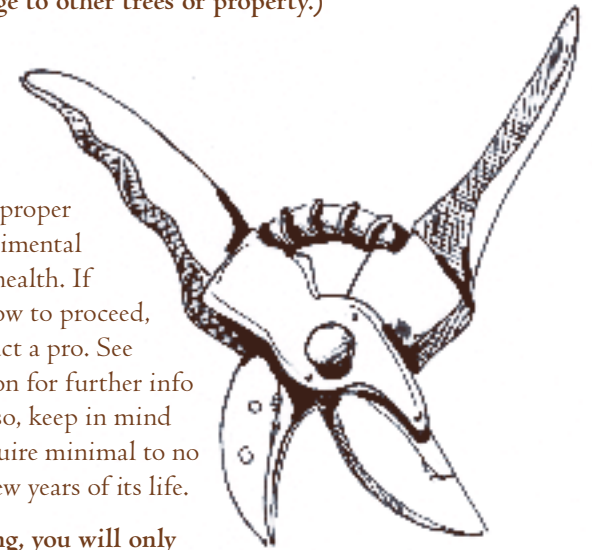
WHY IT'S WORTH YOUR TIME: Pruning and trimming your tree is important for public safety. Low branches over sidewalks and streets could injure someone. In addition, well-pruned trees tend to be healthier, and are less likely to be damaged in storms. (Keep in mind that a tree damaged in a storm may die, or cause damage to other trees or property.)

What you'll need:

Pruning shears

How to do it:

Make sure you know what you're doing! Improper pruning can have detrimental effects on your tree's health. If you're uncertain on how to proceed, don't hesitate to contact a pro. See the "Resources" section for further info on who to talk to. Also, keep in mind that your tree will require minimal to no pruning for the first few years of its life.



While your tree is young, you will only need to prune if:

- You find a small, broken, dead, dying or damaged branch on your tree.
- Your tree has more than one *leader*, or dominant center, sky-pointing branch.

Advice from the pros:

- Invest in the best pair of pruning shears that your gardening budget will allow for. You'll be glad you did, as they'll last longer, and may have replaceable parts.
- Be careful to prune just enough, but don't overdo it.

Additional Resources

ORGANIZATIONS

The Park People

Denver Digs Trees
715 South Franklin
Denver, Colorado 80209
www.theparkpeople.org
303-722-6262

City and County of Denver

Natural Resources – Forestry Unit
201 West Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80202
720-913-0651

Colorado State Cooperative Extension

www.ext.colostate.edu/index.html
Denver County: 720-913-5270
Adams County: 303-637-8100
Arapahoe County: 303-730-9120

Colorado Tree Coalition

www.coloradotrees.org
303-438-9338

Colorado State Forest Service

www.colostate.edu/Depts/CSFS
970-491-1930

National Arbor Day Foundation

www.arborday.org
402-474-5655

Rocky Mountain Chapter- International Society of Arboriculture

www.isarmc.org
303-756-1815



Additional Resources

BOOKS

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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Giving Tree, Shel Silverstein

The Lorax, Dr. Seuss

Fandex Family Field Guides: Trees,

Steven M. L. Aronson

The Secret Life of Trees, Chiara Chevallie

My Favorite Tree: Terrific Trees

of North America, Diane Iverson



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