Learning Activities for Planting and Growing a Tree

Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District

1. Planting your tree

Plant your tree as soon as possible after you receive it. See https://www.arborday.org/trees/planting/bare-root.cfm to learn how to plant your seedling or download a guide at www.knox-lincoln.org/storage/special-events/plant-sale/Plant-Care.docx. Use the soil from the hole you dig for it and don't add compost or fertilizer. Placing some leaf litter on top around the tree to mulch it, but keep the leaves away from the tree's stem. You can add a small amount of top soil (2-3 inches at the top of the hole) if the soil is very poor. Make sure water drains out when poured in the bottom of the hole before you plant there.

Water your tree the first two days, then twice a week for a month, then once per week for the rest of the growing season (through October 15), unless it's raining a lot. Water twice a week during any very hot dry periods the first year. Continue the weekly watering routine for the first 2 or 3 years.

Add fencing or mesh to protect your tree from browsing. Brainstorm other ways you will take care of your tree, and learn more at https://www.arborday.org/trees/index-planting.cfm.

2. Measure your tree

Use a ruler or a yardstick, and place it next to your tree near the stem and measure from the ground to the top of the end bud on the highest point of the stem. What is the height of the tree?

Repeat this activity in September. How much has your tree grown? How do you use math to figure this out?

You can measure your tree every year this way to chart its growth.

Older students: Use the Report a Tree app on Anecdata.org to send us information on your tree (Also for the next section).

3. Assess your tree's health. Do this in June and again in September.

Are there any dead branches?

Is there areas where the bark is missing or the stem is damaged?

Are the leaves green in June and July, or have they changed color? Are they damaged?

Based on your answers, do you think your tree is healthy?

What are some things that can stress a tree? What can you do to reduce these stresses?

4. Observe and document your tree.

Note all the changes you can each week while it grows this spring and summer.

How are the leaves changing (look at color, shapes and size)?

Are there insects on it? What are they doing?

Is anybody feeding on your tree?

Draw pictures of your tree and its leaves. You can also sketch its twigs and buds up close. Don't remove any leaves though! It is a small tree and needs all of its leaves.

You can also draw what your tree will look like in your yard when it grows up.

Take pictures of your tree every week or two all year. Share your photos and sketches through a multimedia project or online. Share them with us if you'd like!

Do these activities with other trees in your yard. What species are they? How are they different from your seedling? Use https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/ to identify trees, using the simplified key.

If you like measuring, you can measure more trees in your yard, including width, diameter and height.

On plain paper, draw a map of all the trees and shrub in your yard, viewed from above like in an aerial photo. Or, print an aerial photo of your yard and use colored pencils and other media to create a map of your yard with the trees labeled. Including other features in your yard and indicate how they are a part of nature.

5. How does your tree fit into nature?

Research things that your tree species provides for wildlife.

> What are the species of animals (including insects, but you don't need to find species for these, just types) that use your tree ?
>
> What do they use it for?

Older students:

Use the Tree Atlas https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/atlas/ to find out where your tree is native and lives right now? How will that change in the future? Where might it live in Maine?

Use the Tree Atlas life histories (on the right side of the page for your tree) and other sites to add more information on its relationships to other species and its role in ecosystems.

Use Project Learning Tree tools (see links at the end) to calculate other environmental benefits of the trees in your yard. (math activity).

All ages:

Draw a picture diagram showing your tree's relationship to other living things after talking about the questions above together.

Other activities to do in your yard, parks or woods with trees and nature:

- Visit Project Learning Tree backyard activities page: https://www.plt.org/activities-for-families/in-your-own-backyard/
- Do other family learning activities from Project Learning Tree: https://www.plt.org/activities-for-families/

- **Do our eco-landscape checklist to see how many nature-friendly features you have, and to add more elements that support nature! You can also certify your yard with us, and it's free!**

  More info: https://waldocountysoilandwater.org/land-certification/

  Checklist for your yard: https://waldocountysoilandwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Conservation-Landscape-Cert-Checklist-RES-SM-20.1-2.docx