

top 12 tips for happy, healthy trees

leaf & limb





My name is Basil Camu and I'm a Treecologist at Leaf & Limb. I'm a plant enthusiast and die-hard green thumb. I simply love tending to plants, trees, and perennials. I especially love fostering healthy soil. I find that the more I learn about these things, the less I know. Nature's ecosystems are marvelously complex.

By trade, I care for trees (convenient, right?) and I often see big issues that could be solved with just a few easy rules that I call my **Top 12 Tips for Healthy, Happy Trees.** The following pages include them in no particular order.

Healthy trees, happy people,

Basil Camu



ONE

Before you plant a tree, make sure the species is suited to grow in that location and will have enough space (soil and air) to reach its mature size without impediments.



TWO

When you plant, make sure the root collar (the base of the trunk that spreads into roots) is at or above the surrounding grade.





THREE

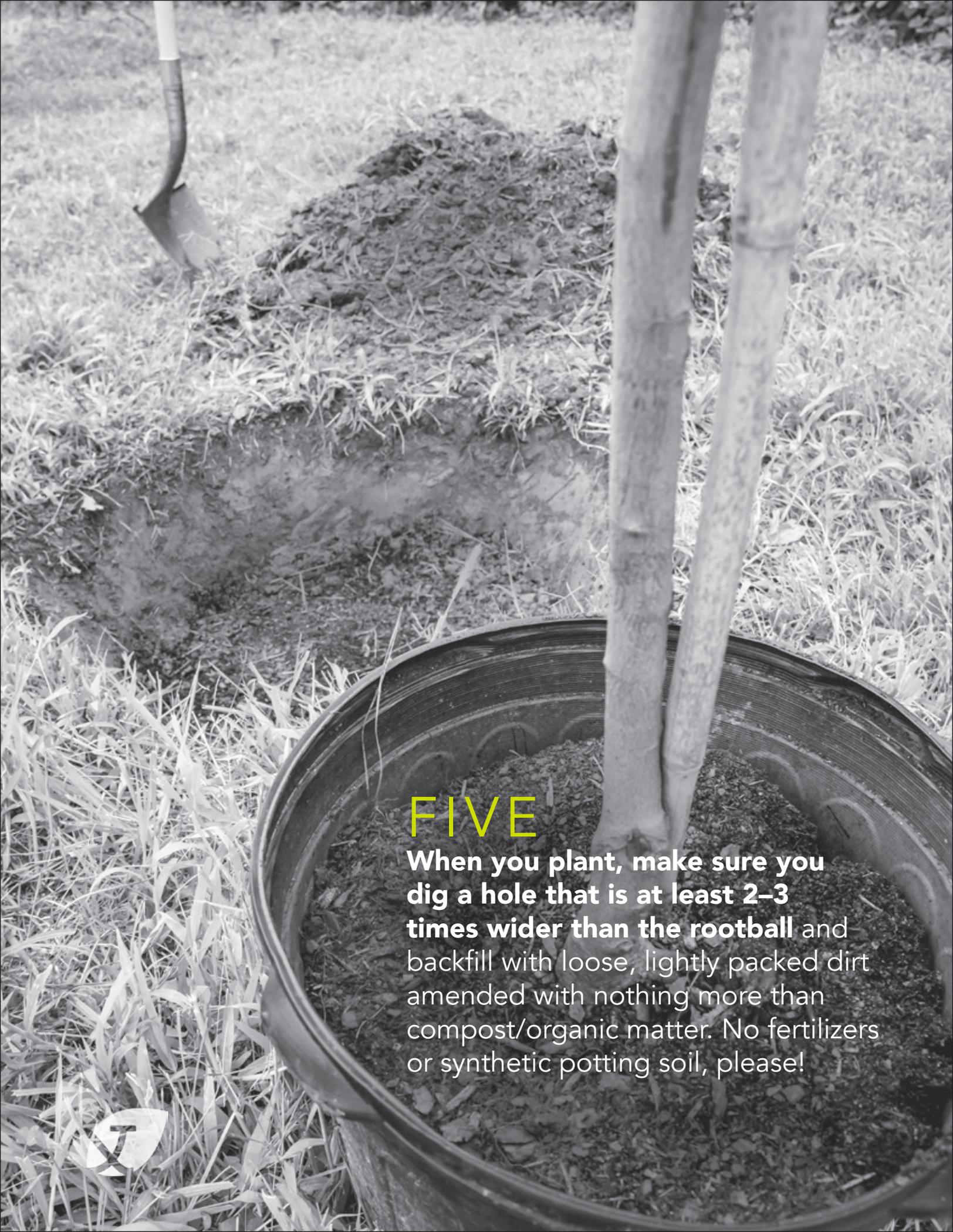
When pruning, always have a goal in mind. Pruning with no goal is like building a house with no plan.



FOUR

When pruning, always make cuts just outside of the branch collar, which is located at the base of the branch and is the only place on the tree that can properly “heal” (technically trees compartmentalize wounds) and keep decay out.





FIVE

When you plant, make sure you dig a hole that is at least 2–3 times wider than the rootball and backfill with loose, lightly packed dirt amended with nothing more than compost/organic matter. No fertilizers or synthetic potting soil, please!



SIX

Arborist wood chips are a great, easy way to care for your tree. Place them around your tree every year. Avoid piling mulch on the root collar. This is called a mulch volcano and is very harmful to the plant. The wood chips should be about 3-6 inches deep.

Pro tip: You can get arborist wood chips for free from any local tree service.



SEVEN

Give your tree plenty of water, but not too much. Grab a pinch of soil from under the canopy of the tree. Roll it around in your fingers. The soil should be moist, not dry or saturated.



EIGHT

Think twice before you use traditional fertilizers. These products can give your plants an immediate boost, but in the long term, can be very harmful.



A close-up photograph of a tree branch. The bark is dark and textured, covered with patches of greyish-blue lichen. Several small, light-colored, cylindrical insect frass (droppings) are attached to the bark. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest or garden setting.

NINE

Avoid using broad spectrum pesticides.

Any treatment should be targeted to a specific pest and should use the most ecosystem-friendly approach possible. This often begins with addressing underlying health issues.



TEN

Soil is the foundation for healthy trees and shrubs.

If you want to improve the soil, make sure it has plenty of pore space for water and air. Add organic matter (leaf compost, mulch, etc) each year. Avoid destroying the soil biology with chemicals such as herbicides.



ELEVEN

Some pest damage to a tree is normal. There is a point when insects go from being a normal part of the ecosystem to being a threat to your plant. This is called threshold. Unless the insect damage has crossed that threshold, you don't need to treat it. Just let it be.



A close-up photograph of a cedar branch with vibrant green, needle-like foliage. The branch is positioned diagonally across the upper right portion of the frame. The background is a soft-focus forest of similar greenery, creating a sense of depth and immersion in a natural setting.

TWELVE

When in doubt, look at trees in the forest.

How are they growing and thriving? Use your observations to experiment, and have fun!





Want to learn more about how to take care of your trees?

Sign-up for Treecology 101: the Fundamentals of Tree Care

Every two weeks, we'll send you an in-depth e-mail about a specific tree care topic including:

- basic pruning tips,
- the importance of soil,
- and other tree care fundamentals.

Sign up here:

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