

7 Places to Never Plant a Tree

Whether you want to grow a lush evergreen hedge or a dramatic willow, trees are a beautiful way to add height and color to the landscape. Many trees are relatively hands-off once they get established, but young trees need the proper growing conditions to ensure they thrive and reach maturity.

To set your trees up for success, it's important to take time considering where to plant them. Research their sun and soil requirements, as well as how tall and wide they are expected to get. To help you select the optimal planting location, we're sharing the places experts say you should never plant trees.

Areas With Inadequate Sunlight

Most trees need at least six hours of full sun per day to thrive. Insufficient sunlight can lead to slow growth, fungal diseases, pest infestations, and other issues. That said, some trees are understory trees and can tolerate shade. "Research the tree you are wanting to plant and make sure that its sunlight requirements meet the conditions of the spot you intend to plant it in," says Edwin Dysinger, expert gardener and co-founder of Seedtime.

Where Water Pools

Avoid planting trees in areas of your landscape where water pools and is slow to drain. "Standing water suffocates tree roots by cutting off oxygen," says Alexander Betz, Landscape Designer and founder of Plant by Number. "Root rot, fungal diseases, and poor root development are common. Trees may appear stressed, yellowed, or die altogether."

Pest-Prone Areas

Overgrown areas with a lot of weeds and debris can be a haven for insects that target specific tree species, such as emerald ash borer, tent caterpillars, or scale insects, says Tabar Gifford, master gardener and partnership cultivator at American Meadows. "Planting a vulnerable species in a pest-prone zone can create a feeding ground, weakening the tree and contributing to broader infestation issues," she says.

Tip

Choose pest-resistant species and diversify your plantings to avoid monocultures that invite outbreaks.

Spots That Are Too Small

Trees need room to grow and for the roots to spread. "Crowding too close to other trees or too close to structures can limit light to the tree and restrict air circulation, both of which will cause the tree to be more susceptible to disease and pests," says Dysinger. "It can also result in bent, leaning, or lopsided growth as the young tree tries to reach out of its close confines for freedom and light." He recommends researching the growth habit of your tree before planting it.

Close to Your Foundation

Planting trees too close to your home or other foundations puts those structures at risk. "It is generally recommended to plant small trees no closer than 10 feet from your house or structure, and to keep large trees at least 20 to 30 feet away," says Dysinger. "But even those distances should be considered carefully."

He adds that planting trees too close to your home can cause structural damage from fallen branches, a cracked foundation from invasive roots, and potentially increase mold growth. "A house under trees will probably be shadier, have more moisture and humidity, and less airflow, conditions that are conducive to the growth of mold," he says.

Near Power or Utility Lines

Keep trees away from your power or utility lines. "Tree roots can interfere with underground utilities like water, gas, or sewer lines. Root intrusion can cause costly damage, require excavation, and even disrupt essential services," says Betz. Trees planted too close to power lines may result in outages or safety hazards from fallen branches.

In Poorly Drained Soils

Most trees need well-drained soil to flourish. "Saturated, compacted, or clay-heavy soil prevents roots from breathing," says Betz. "Similar to areas with pooled water, growth slows and trees become more prone to disease or death." Do a soil test before planting a tree in your yard. The results will tell you what to amend your soil with to improve drainage.

Independence