

# Chapter Four: Tree Planting & Young Tree Care





# Pre-Training Activity: Make an Outreach Plan & Select Your Target Neighborhoods

With your newfound site selection experience, community organizing tactics, and urban forestry knowledge, it's time to make a plan. Select one or two neighborhoods you'd like to focus throughout the duration of this program as a Tree Ambassador — Then decide which streets and neighborhood blocks you'll start with for outreach on your quest to plant more street and yard trees.

Write down the names of streets you'd like to target for greening, based on your vision for your community, greening need, or input from other community leaders or neighborhood groups. Identify individuals who you can lean on to support you as you start to organize your community to plant more trees.

- Name the neighborhood you're choosing to focus on
- List out streets, homes, or properties in that neighborhood that could use more trees
- Name key stakeholders (a church, a business owner, a particular neighbor etc.) that you can enlist for support. If you don't know of one, try to find one.
- Identify your outreach and community organizing method (Will you go door to door? Will you reach out to the neighborhood council? Will you host a neighborhood tree walk to share what you've learned and sign people up for free trees?)
- Set target dates for implementation

If you need assistance with creating an action plan, reach out to the planting or outreach staff at your organization!

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# Planting Season

Before we break out the shovels, consider the Los Angeles climate and the effect it will have on a newly planted tree. Ideally, you are not planting trees during hot summer months. In summer, high temperatures make it hard to plant — both for trees and for the people planting them. **Planting season in Los Angeles is typically late September through May**, depending on current climate conditions.

# Tree Planting

The first three to five years after planting a tree are the most important for its long-term health and survival. These years are like preschool for young trees — they need extra love so they can grow strong enough to support themselves. During this time, young trees will establish their root systems and expand their canopy. With proper care, young trees will grow 30-60% faster during their first five growing seasons.

**Look for quality stock:** Nursery growing practices can impact a tree's health before it's planted. Selecting quality stock is critical.

**Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason:** Before you get digging, remember to first consider your surroundings — The goal is to plant trees where they will be able to thrive. Here's a recap of some of the questions to consider:

- Is there adequate space above and below ground for the tree to grow to maturity?
- Is the tree suited to your Sunset Climate Zone?
- What's the soil type and drainage of your site?
- Is the site irrigated?
- Is the tree evergreen or deciduous?
- What's the size of the tree when it's fully grown?

## What tools do you need?



1. Mulch 2. Gloves 3. Shovel 4. Hammer/Stake pounder and nails 5. Tree stakes and ties 6. Hose or water bucket (10-15 gallons) and most importantly, bring a friend or family member! Tree planting is more fun when we do it together!

# How to Plant a Tree

## 1. Select your site

Remember "right tree, right place, right reason," and think about where the tree will be able to thrive at full growth and maturity. Planting to the west of a building is best for energy savings. Call DigAlert at 811 at least two days before planting to avoid running into any underground utilities.

## 2. Dig a hole

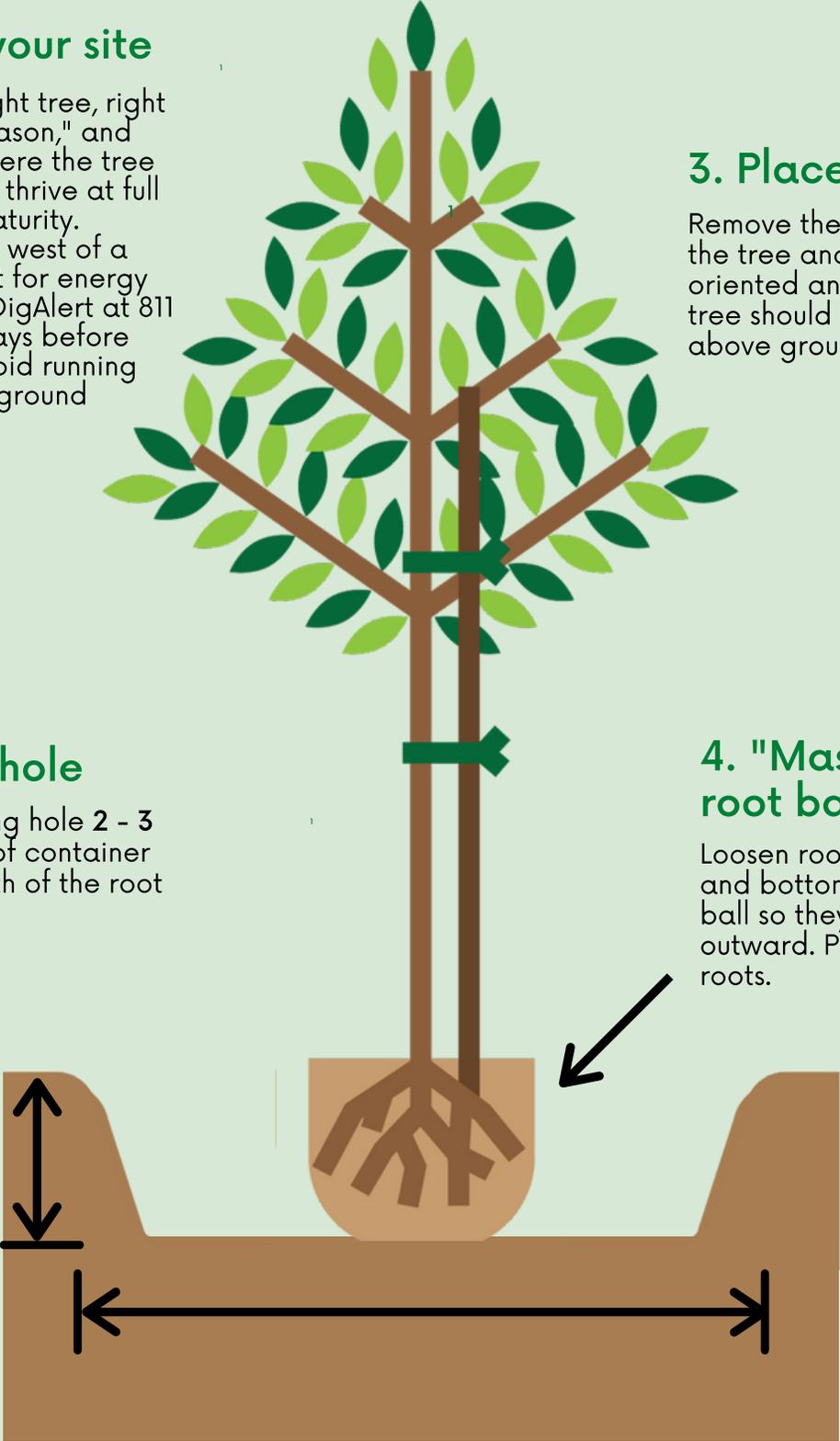
Make planting hole 2 - 3 times width of container and the depth of the root ball.

## 3. Place the tree

Remove the container from the tree and place it so it is oriented and centered. The tree should be level or 1" above ground.

## 4. "Massage" the root ball

Loosen roots from sides and bottom of the root ball so they can grow outward. Prune circling roots.



# How to Plant a Tree

## 5. Backfill

Fill hole with soil. Make sure the trunk flare is at or slightly above ground level — It's important to not plant the tree **too high** or **too low**. Tap the soil to remove any air pockets.

## 6. Build a berm

Build a berm about 6 inches high to help water soak deeply into the soil

## 7. Remove the nursery stake

Remove nursery stake — the stake tied against the trunk — before installing new tree stakes and fill its hole with soil.

## 8. Install stakes

Install new stakes 18" deep out-side of root ball on either side of the tree.

## 9. Install tree ties

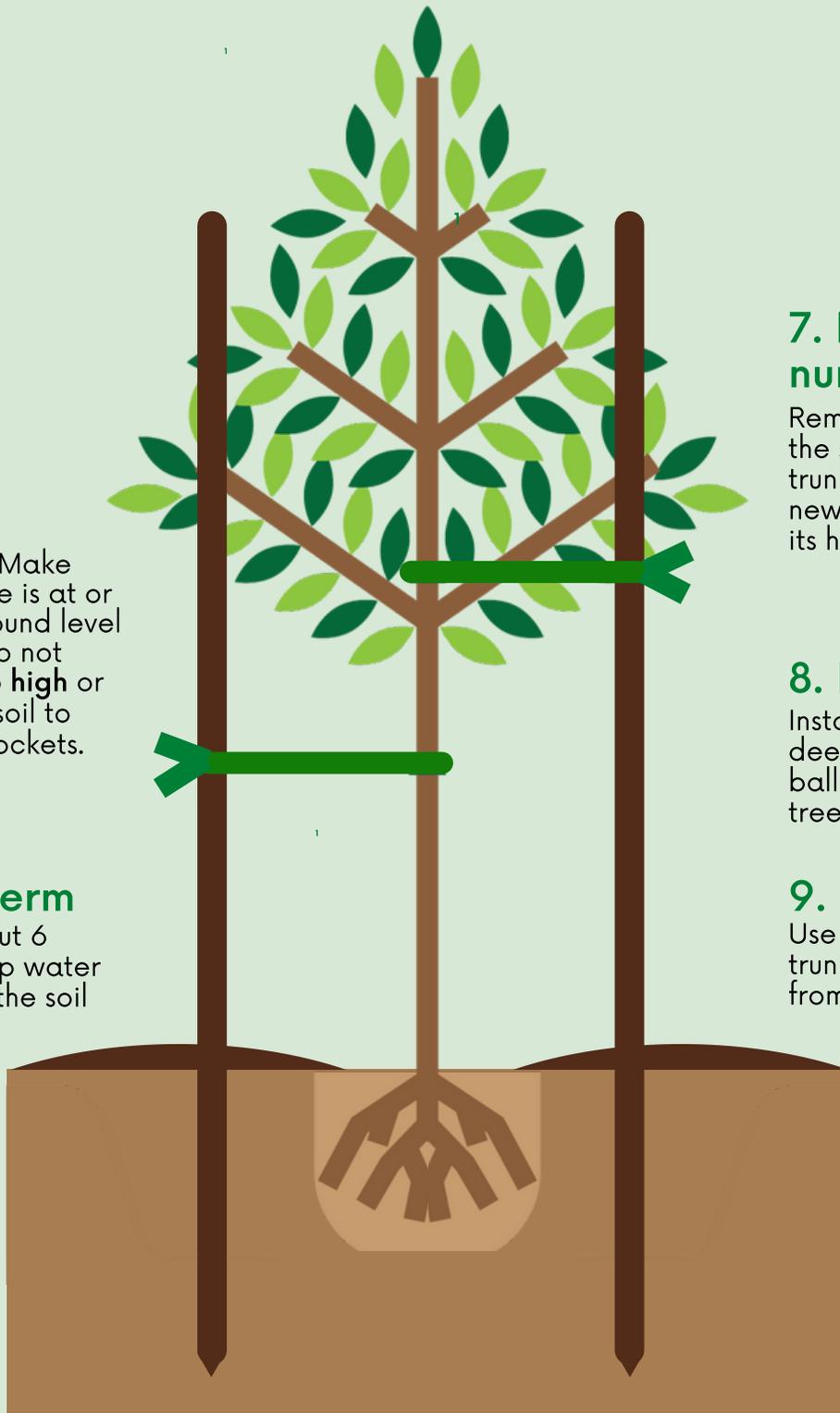
Use rubber ties to secure trunk and to keep tree from falling over.

## 10. Water deeply

Slowly water the basin thoroughly with 10-15 gallons of water immediately after planting.

## 11. Apply mulch

Add 4" layer of mulch around tree keeping 5 - 6" away from the base of the trunk.



# Tree Staking

Tree stakes are can help stabilize a young tree that may not be able to support itself and protect public street trees from damage or vandalism — but not all trees need to be staked. **Stake a yard tree only if it cannot support itself or if it's planted in an area with a lot of pedestrian activity where it might get damaged. Street trees currently require stakes in Los Angeles.**

Once the tree is stable and can support itself, the stakes can be removed. Your tree is ready when it can stand upright without stakes and the rootball doesn't shift when you push back and forth on the trunk. Removing stakes too late can damage the tree.

You should regularly check to see if the tree ties and stakes are damaging the tree. The area around the tree ties may have signs of damage such as loss of bark. If this is the case, you should remove the tree ties or stakes.

# SOIL HEALTH

**Berms** are basins of soil used to contain water around the base of a young tree. A berm forms a circle around the base of the tree and stand about three inches high and six inches thick. It will ensure that water filters deep into the soil where the tree's roots, and it will also make watering young trees easier, as berms help retain water. Create a berm using extra soil before watering your tree for the first time.

**Mulch** is placed on top of the surface of the soil. Organic mulches include leaves, shredded or chopped bark and branches. Mulch reduces weed growth, evaporation, and insulates the soil from heat in summer and cold in winter. It acts like a sponge to hold and absorb moisture. It is broken down by worms and microorganisms, helps to create pathways for needed water and oxygen, and ultimately is broken down into soil.

A healthy tree will be able to gather all the nutrients that it needs without the help of fertilizer. Relying on fertilizer can make it more difficult for the tree to adapt to its new environment, and synthetic fertilizer can pollute water.

# Young Tree Care

The first three to five years after planting a tree are especially important for long-term survival and health. A young tree with the proper support will grow into a healthy mature tree that will provide shade and other tree benefits for decades. You might consider making a "date" with your tree each week to check in on its health and figure out what it needs.

## 1

### Watering

When you water your trees, it is important to water the soil around the tree — not the trunk or leaves — with deep watering. Deep watering is the practice of slowly trickling 10-15 gallons of water into the watering basin around the base of a tree. Sprinklers will not sufficiently water young trees. While sprinklers work well to water shallower roots, water should percolate deep into the soil around a tree to encourage root growth.

Both overwatering and underwatering can cause problems, so remember to check the soil. Do not keep the soil saturated with water all the time. Roots need oxygen, just like we do, and when they are submerged in water they are not able to breathe.

**A general rule of thumb is to water your tree once per week for the first three to five years. In the hotter months some trees might need water twice per week.** Once the tree has been in the ground for a year or two, you can start watering less frequently as it starts to find its own water.

## 2

### Weeding & Removing "Suckers"

Weeds and "suckers" — branches or sprouts growing from the base of a tree — compete for resources like water with young trees, so it is important to remove them. Weeds also have extensive root systems that block tree roots and inhibit growth.

## 3

### Adjusting or Removing Stakes & Ties

If you have chosen to use stakes, check to see if stakes or ties need to be adjusted, pounded back into the ground, or removed.



Photo Credit: TreePeople

# 4

## Mulching

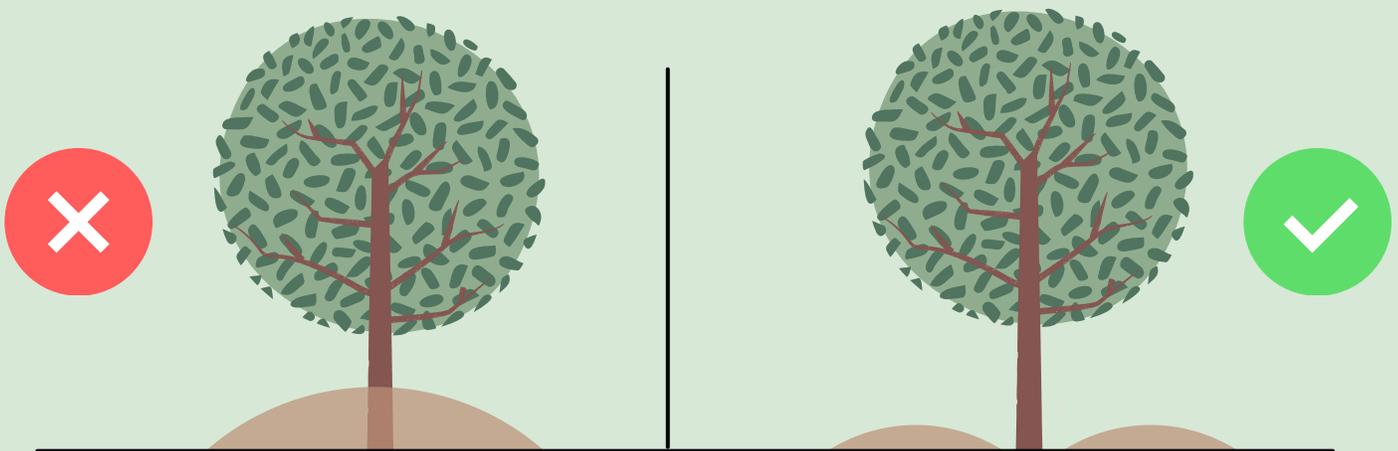
Mulch is organic material — like shredded bark, wood chips or leaves — that is placed on top of soil, and it provides many benefits. In nature, mulch occurs naturally from plant litter such as leaves and bark that fall from trees. In the city, trees are often prevented from making mulch naturally as we sweep up the leaf litter that falls to the ground. It's best to put mulch 2 – 4 inches thick and cover as much of the tree's root system as possible. Keep mulch 5 – 6 inches away from the trunk of your tree.

### Benefits of Mulch

- Adding a layer of mulch protects the soil from the sunlight and keeps the water in the soil, where it's needed most.
- Mulch forms a natural barrier to competing seeds. Mulch can prevent weeds from taking over and outcompeting tree growth.
- Because mulch is composed of organic materials, it will also naturally decompose and deposit nutrients into the soil. This form of nutrient recycling acts as natural fertilizer.

### Excessive Mulch

- Avoid the dreaded “mulch volcano!” A mulch volcano is a mound of mulch that covers the entire base of the tree. Mulch volcanoes keep the base of the trunk moist, leaving the tree vulnerable to rot and potentially causing roots to grow on top of the soil rather than into soil.



# 5

## Pruning Young Trees

Pruning can help encourage healthy and proper structural growth. Pruning can also feel like completing a puzzle, and it requires practice, knowledge, and skill, as each cut you make to a tree has the potential to impact its longterm health — for better or for worse.

For young trees, less is more when it comes to pruning. During the first few years, leave lower branches on your young trees to encourage growth. After that, you can begin structurally pruning your tree for healthy structure. For young trees, do not remove more than 25% of the tree's live branches each year, and make sure there is always one **central leader** to encourage good structural growth. If you do prune, focus on the "Four Ds" — dead, damaged, diseased, or deranged branches.

Tree Ambassadors are not expected to prune public or private property trees. Pruning is an art - When in doubt, consult a certified arborist.

### Benefits of Pruning

<b>Healthier Trees</b>	Removing branches that are damaged or diseased is important in preserving the health of the tree. Cutting away dead branches allows the tree to more efficiently nourish the remaining branches.
<b>Safer Trees</b>	Damaged branches can cause damage or injury. Removing these branches safely can prevent any accidents from happening.
<b>Prettier Trees</b>	Appropriate removal of damaged, diseased, dead, and deranged branches is not only good for the tree, but it also makes them more beautiful.

# The Four D's of Pruning

## Damaged

Broken and damaged branches open the tree up to pests and disease. Make a clean cut back to a bud on a young stem, to another branch, or remove the branch entirely.

## Diseased

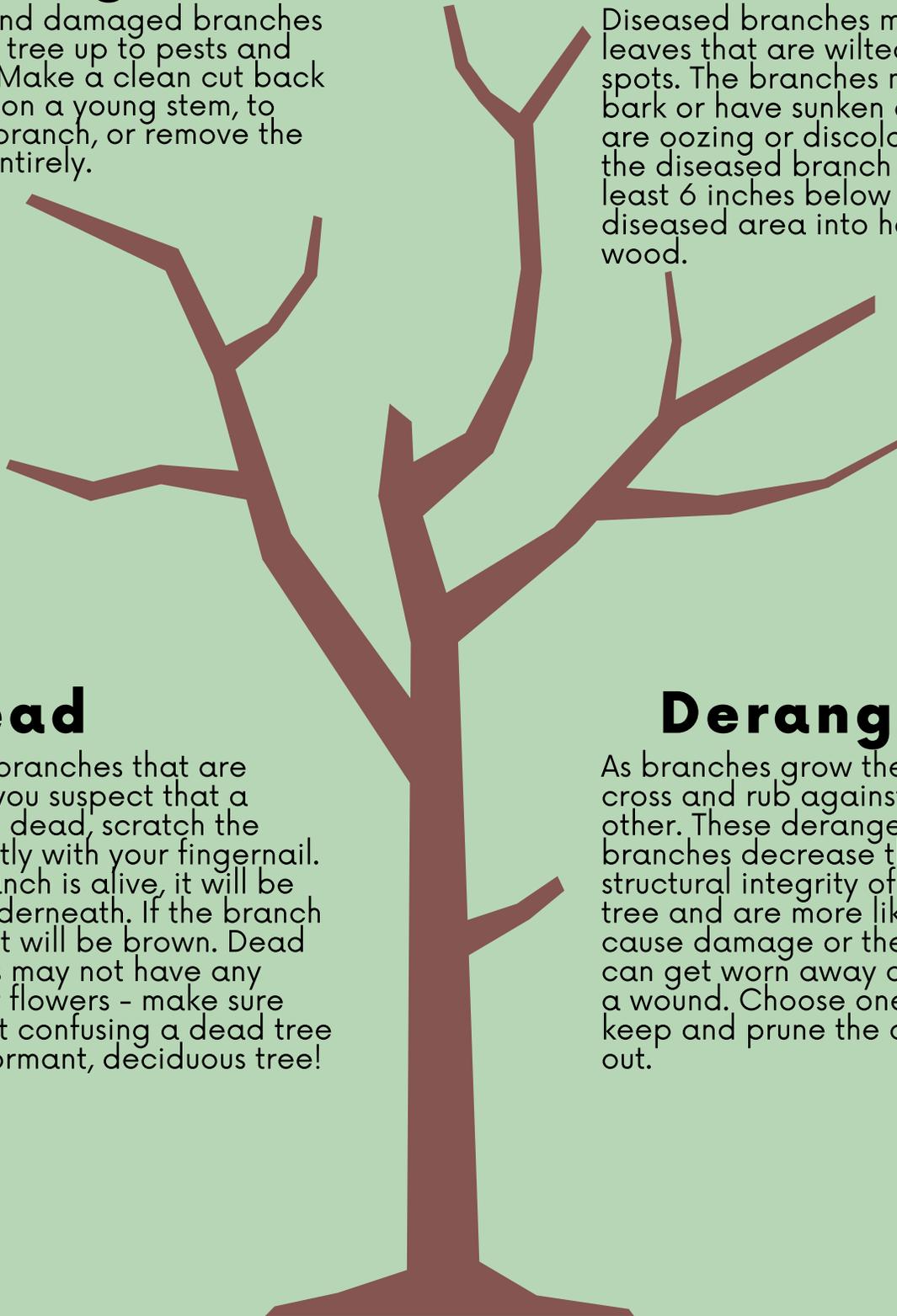
Diseased branches may have leaves that are wilted or have spots. The branches may lack bark or have sunken areas that are oozing or discolored. Prune the diseased branch back to at least 6 inches below the diseased area into healthy wood.

## Dead

Remove branches that are dead. If you suspect that a branch is dead, scratch the bark gently with your fingernail. If the branch is alive, it will be green underneath. If the branch is dead, it will be brown. Dead branches may not have any leaves or flowers - make sure you're not confusing a dead tree with a dormant, deciduous tree!

## Deranged

As branches grow they often cross and rub against each other. These deranged branches decrease the structural integrity of the tree and are more likely to cause damage or the bark can get worn away creating a wound. Choose one to keep and prune the others out.





# Risks of Pruning

1

## Improper Pruning

Improper pruning can cause permanent damage to a tree. If you are unsure if a tree needs to be pruned or how to prune a tree, please consult a certified arborist for more information.

2

## Over Pruning

Pruning too much can harm the tree. It is bad for the biology of the tree, as the ends of branches are what direct growth throughout the tree. Over-pruning also reduces the amount of shade that the tree can provide to both people and itself. Sun scalding can occur from too much direct sunlight. Never prune more than 25% of a tree's branches per year.

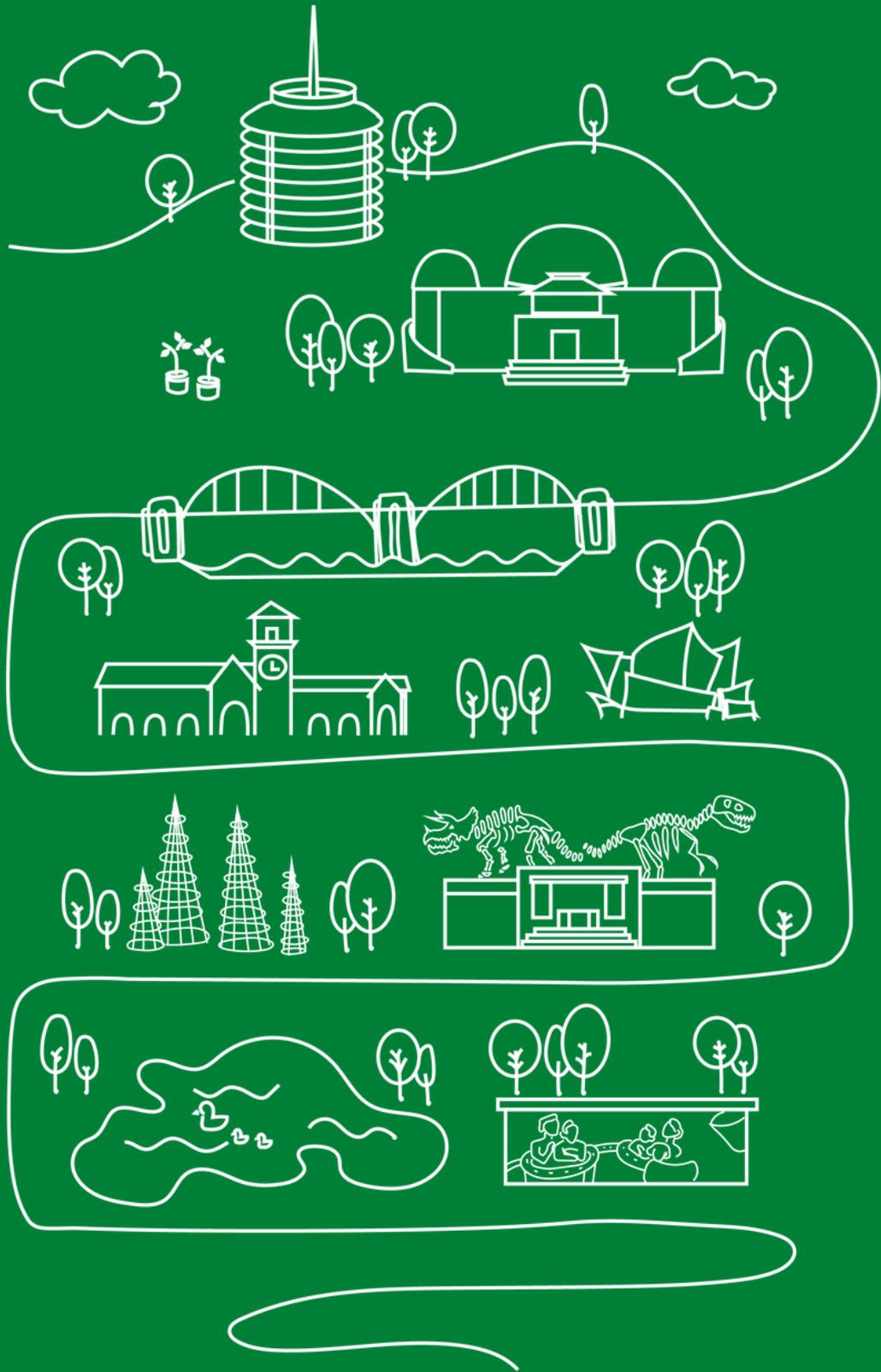
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## Tree Topping

Tree "topping" is the practice of harshly, bluntly, and harmfully trimming main branches, generally on mature trees, leaving stubs in place of branches, which can become susceptible to disease and decay. Topping severely threatens the long term health of the tree and stunts growth, and it ultimately result in the tree's death. **Avoid topping at all costs** — You'll probably see glaring cases of tree topping all around Los Angeles if you look for it.







**Your city. Your voice. Your urban forest.**  
**Tu voz. Tu ciudad. Tu bosque urbano.**