United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

A Tree-Planting Guide for the U.S. Virgin Islands

DRAFT

To successfully plant and establish a healthy tree, the tree planter must consider the trees' needs and provide them. Different trees have different requirements, and a healthy tree depends on having appropriate soil conditions and receiving the proper amounts of sun and water. This guide will help you put THE RIGHT TREE IN THE RIGHT PLACE and give you the "how to" for planting healthy trees.

When—Timing tree planting projects to coincide with the rainy season is a great way to save time and ensure the sensitive young plants get enough water. In the Virgin Islands the best planting time is the rainy season between August and October if you are planting a large number of trees far from a water source.

Where—Putting the RIGHT TREE IN THE RIGHT PLACE requires a simple plan and some basic knowledge of the site and the trees being planted there. Here are a few questions to answer before planting:

Height. What is the tree's adult height? Is there enough room for the tree to grow without bumping into power lines or threatening a building? Don't plan on planting large trees and pruning them every year; it is expensive and a waste of time. Plant small trees near power lines and buildings and large trees in open areas.

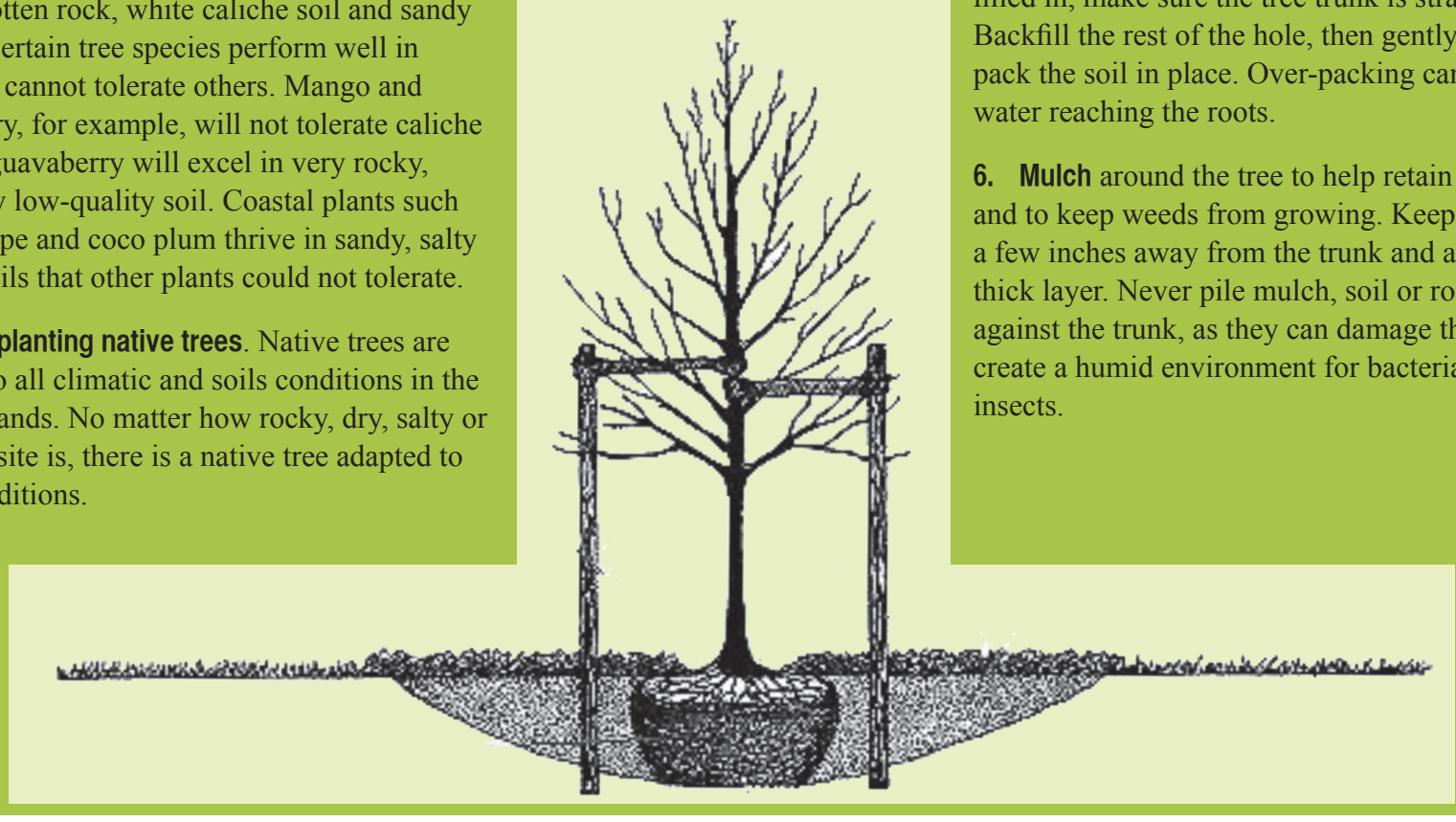
Canopy. How wide does the tree get? Trees such as flamboyant, ficus and saman grow only to a medium height, but have large spreading canopies.

Roots. Trees absorb all of the moisture they need to survive from their roots, and most of these roots are very close to the soil surface. Ideally, trees should have 15 feet of space in every direction that is free of concrete. Paving kills tree roots, and roots can break sidewalks and roads. The best plan is to keep roots and concrete separated.

Moisture. What is the rainfall on site? The east ends of the Virgin Islands tend to be dryer than the west ends and higher elevations. Divi, turpentine, and fiddle wood do well in dry areas, while lignum vitae, frangipani and others thrive even in extreme drought.

Soil. The Virgin Islands has several soil types, such as rotten rock, white caliche soil and sandy coastal. Certain tree species perform well in some and cannot tolerate others. Mango and guavaberry, for example, will not tolerate caliche soil, but guavaberry will excel in very rocky, seemingly low-quality soil. Coastal plants such as sea grape and coco plum thrive in sandy, salty coastal soils that other plants could not tolerate.

Consider planting native trees. Native trees are adapted to all climatic and soils conditions in the Virgin Islands. No matter how rocky, dry, salty or wet your site is, there is a native tree adapted to those conditions.

How—Start with choosing the RIGHT TREE FOR THE RIGHT PLACE. Make sure your tree has enough room to grow to its adult height and DON'T FORGET TO LOOK UP.

1. **Dig a wide shallow hole** about the same depth as the pot and roughly three times the diameter of your container, pot or root ball. It is important to dig a wide hole, not a deep one.
2. **Remove the container**, plastic, burlap or wire from around the trees roots. These things only impede growth after planting. With your fingers, gently pull apart any coiled or 'potbound' roots. This is important to ensure the roots spread and grow into the large hole you created
3. **Identify the trunk flare**, which is where the roots begin to spread out from the base of the tree. This point on the trunk should still be partially visible after the tree is planted.
4. **Place the tree in the hole at the proper height.** The roots should be spread out in the hole and the trunk flare should be at approximately the same depth as the surrounding ground.
5. **Backfill the hole** using the soil you dug from the hole and mixed with any compost. When the hole is halfway filled in, make sure the tree trunk is straight. Backfill the rest of the hole, then gently but firmly pack the soil in place. Over-packing can prevent water reaching the roots.
6. **Mulch** around the tree to help retain moisture and to keep weeds from growing. Keep the mulch a few inches away from the trunk and apply a thick layer. Never pile mulch, soil or rocks up against the trunk, as they can damage the trunk and create a humid environment for bacteria, fungus or insects.