



## 10 Tips for Growing Healthy Seedlings

- **Plant the Right Tree Species for your Area:** The best advice for choosing which trees to plant in an area can be found in the healthy trees already present in and around property. Landowners can begin with tree options by exploring what is already thriving close by.

Beyond careful observation, the AFC has foresters all over the state. Whether folks are seeking recommendations for urban or rural areas, all AFC tree recommendation advice - and possible land management planning - is a FREE service to Arkansans. Contact information for local foresters can be found at [www.forestry.arkansas.gov](http://www.forestry.arkansas.gov).

- **Seasonal Timing:** Tree seedlings (or, baby trees) should be planted during the right time of year. From January 1- March 31 (approximately), humidity levels, temperatures, and seedling maturity allow for the best planting conditions. Seedlings can be picked up after January 1 at most forest tree nurseries or from remote cooler locations – whether they are bare root seedlings or containerized seedlings.
- **Choose a Good Day to Plant:** Try to plant your seedlings during the following weather conditions: Temperatures between 33 degrees – 75 degrees; Humidity levels at 50% or higher; Wind at less than 10 mph; Moist ground, from recent rain (not saturated).
- **Handle Gently:** Seedling boxes and packages should not be thrown or walked on. Gently transport them in cooled trucks, or to cooled locations. Do not stack too many on top of one another and be very careful with the roots.
- **Store Carefully:** Seedlings are usually most easily damaged after pick-up from the nursery and during storage time before planting. When choosing a place to store seedlings away from the nursery, consider temperature and moisture. Optimum seedling storage temperature is 34-40 degrees.
  - Do not store seedlings in a location where they will freeze. The location should be cool, not freezing.
  - Do not store seedlings in a location where the temperature inside the storage bag will exceed 70 degrees (40 degrees is much more optimal). The seedlings use stored food to survive transplant shock. Extreme heat depletes those food reserves.
  - Do not let the seedling roots dry out. Nurseries usually treat roots with a moisture-enhancing gel before they are packaged. This usually keeps seedlings moist enough to withstand several weeks of storage. However, once seedlings are unpackaged, it is imperative to get them into moist ground as soon as possible.

- **Keep Storage Time Short:** Do not plan to pick up and un-package your seedlings from the nursery until you plan to get them in the ground within one week. Try to plant trees before humidity levels increase (usually after or around March 15th). The high humidity increases the heat retained in the storage bags and can thereby make the seedlings too hot.
- **Moisture:** Make sure that the ground you choose for planting seedlings has moisture, without saturation. Also avoid ground with standing water. If the ground is saturated, it does not have appropriate drainage for the seedling to mature.
- **Do Not Trim the Seedling Roots:** Do not prune or cut off any parts of the seedling, especially the roots. They should be left as they are, and handled gently.
- **Plant your Seedling Correctly:** Plant the seedling deep enough. The root collar (or the little transition area between the tree stem and the root stem) should be just beneath the ground. For pine trees, you can go even deeper – arranging it so that just a bud is peaking from the ground.
- **Leave NO Air Pockets:** As you fill dirt in around a seedling, leave no air pockets in the planting hole. Pack the dirt back in firmly, but with care, so that roots are not damaged.

Landowners can reference the FREE Seedling Care and Planting Guidelines book at this link, or can pick this up at the Baucum Nursery or any other AFC county office location:

<http://forestry.arkansas.gov/Seedlings/Documents/SeedlingPlantingGuidelines.pdf>

### **How does a landowner know what the mature version of baby trees will look like?**

The AFC publishes the *Trees of Arkansas* book – with a photo and description of each Arkansas tree species. This is an excellent resource for envisioning how mature trees will develop.

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To report an emergency, dial 911.

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