

# How To Organize A Tree Distribution Event

## *While Spending Almost No Money*

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Each spring and fall for the past two years I have organized a program where immigrants living in our area can sign up to receive free culturally relevant fruit trees planted by us at their home. In the past 2 years I've planted over 220 trees all over the Cedar Valley using the methods I have developed through trial and error. This program has been extremely popular with many people reapplying to receive more trees and sharing the program with their friends and neighbors.

### **Sourcing Trees**

Many states have DNR run nurseries where you can purchase small trees (1-2 years old) in bulk for amazing prices. The Iowa DNR nursery has many native species that work out to about \$1 per tree. [This spreadsheet](#) has a list of all the state DNR nurseries and a list of unique trees they have available. If those don't work, there are some private nurseries that offer bareroot trees in bulk, they will usually be slightly more expensive but still very cheap, usually around \$3-\$7 per tree.

### **Other Supplies**

Tree Protection - Unless the person is 100% sure there are no rabbits, deer, or anything else that might like to munch on the leaves or the bark of a tree, you should have some way to protect the tree. The system we use is using plastic sheets (called tree tube protectors) that are wrapped around the tree anchored by a bamboo stake. I don't love the fact that we're using plastic, but they're at least reusable and it works out to about \$1 per tree. You could also use chicken wire or some other type of fence around the tree. Be creative, see what kind of extra materials you have lying around and figure out a way to use them.

Wood chips - We usually aim for a bucket of wood chips per tree. Most decently sized cities have a place (often called a compost facility or a yard waste facility) where you can pick up wood chips for free. Make sure you make a mulch donut and not a mulch volcano.

### **Behind-The-Scenes Logistics**

We get the word out 3 ways: we put flyers with a QR code and link that people can scan/enter to fill out a google form to indicate how many trees they want, we email the form to people who have received trees in the past, and we ask everyone to share the

program with anyone who they think may be interested. Word of mouth is extremely useful and probably drives 75% of our orders. The google form is useful but not the end all, people can call or email us with their ordering information if they'd prefer. The goal is to get as many sign-ups as we can, and so we try to make the process as easy as possible for the recipients.

We track the shipping and once we have a pretty accurate arrival date for the trees, we email the recipients to schedule planting times. Usually the format is giving them our general availability, and asking them to pick a specific time or ideally, a range of times for us to come and plant, and then reply with a confirmation and a specific time for our arrival. We arrive, have them sign a basic waiver, work with them to figure out where the trees will go, and then get planting! It usually averages out to about 5-10 minutes per tree that we plant.

The trees will either come in a plastic bag or in a box with moist sawdust/other water retaining materials. Keep it in a cool dark place, and keep it closed as long as you can until you need to open it and retrieve your trees. Most information you'll find online assumes that you are planting all the trees at once, so there isn't much information about how to store them.

If the trees came in a plastic bag, close it once you've gotten the trees you'll need, and after a few days add a little bit of water. You should see condensation on the inside of the bag.

If the trees came in a box, add more water either by spraying it with a spray bottle or gently pouring some. Press the sawdust/other materials back into place after you've removed the trees you need at that time.

After a week, I recommend planting any trees that are left in pots with potting soil or other good quality soil. At this point, they could be stored for over a year similar to potted trees that you purchase at nurseries, but I recommend still trying to find a permanent home as soon as possible. Also remember that you will need to water trees in pots more often than you would trees in the ground.

When transporting the trees, make sure that the roots do not dry out. You can keep them in a 5-gallon bucket filled partly up with water (take any turns slowly if doing this or you will get water all over your car, speaking from experience) or wrap the roots in wet paper towels. When we arrive, we have them sign a basic waiver, work with them to figure out where the trees will go, and then get planting! It usually averages out to about 5-10 minutes per tree that we plant.

## Planting

To make it easier for people, we designed the program so that having us come plant their trees was the default option. People could opt to plant the trees themselves after we dropped them off, or even come pick the trees up from our office, but the most popular option was to have us plant them. Anecdotally, planting trees seems to scare people much more than planting flowers or vegetables.

Most trees will want full sun, but be sure to check that's true for whatever varieties you've bought. Make sure you know east, south, and west, and map out where the sun will be in the sky and where any shade will be throughout the day.

Dig a hole deep enough for the tree, plant the tree so that the root flare is at ground level, fill the hole back up with soil, add mulch, add any protection if using, use a watering can's worth of water to water the tree and there you go!

If the soil is dry, compacted, or clay (or all 3) and you can't dig down any farther, use a hose to spray water into the hole, wait for it to soak in, and begin digging again. Repeat as needed.

You probably know this already, but shovels are a tool that uses your lower body muscles. Step on the shovel to push it into the ground. Lots of people only use their arms to try to stab the shovel into the ground which is inefficient and will probably result in injury to their back or arms.

If you have any questions please email [kevindemler@gmail.com](mailto:kevindemler@gmail.com), I would be beyond thrilled to help you implement this project in your community.