Tips for growing trees in pots

Growing trees in pots is ideal for small gardens, patios or terraces. Depending on the space, you can use moveable containers or large, permanent planters.

**Pot size**

Check the expected size of the mature tree, and choose a container with enough space for the growing tree and its roots. The bigger the pot or planter bed, the more room for roots to grow and the better the plant will perform. For the best results, pot your new plant in stages over time. Start with a pot twice the width and depth of the root ball and finish with a large pot of at least 60 cm wide at the top and 55cm deep.

20cm and 25 litre pots are not suitable for growing large plants long term. Re-pot your new tree/shrub into a larger container within two months. 65 litre pots are suitable for large shrubs with root balls up to 45cm wide x 45cm deep. 200 litre pots are suitable for trees with root balls up to 60cm wide x 55cm deep.

**Potting mix**

Use good quality potting mix – look for the Australian Standard symbol on the bag. Garden soil does not drain well in containers and is more prone to weeds, insects and diseases.

**Watering**

Trees in pots dry out quickly and need regular and thorough watering. When it gets dry, a tree stops growing.

**Fertilising**

Frequent watering can leach nutrients out of the soil, so you also need to fertilise your pot plants regularly and in small doses. Use a slow-release organic fertilizer or a water-soluble liquid type. Follow instructions on the packet and check the dosage rates are for plants in containers.

**Re-potting**

The size of a tree is usually proportional to its root system, so a container will usually restrict its size. Every couple of years or so, you’ll notice your plant dries out more quickly and lacks vigour. Unpot the plant, prune the roots back and replant it into the same container, or a larger container if possible. You will need to trim the outer 10mm of the root ball with a sharp knife or your secateurs to stop the roots from growing around the root ball. Put enough potting mix into the new pot so the top of the plant sits about three or four centimetres below the rim, fill with more potting mix and water.

**Weight**

A large pot with soil can be heavy. If you plan to place a large pot on a balcony or rooftop, remember to check structural weight requirements.

**Drainage**

Ensure the bottom of the container has drainage holes for excess water. Remember, adding gravel to the bottom of the container does not improve the drainage.

These trees have reached the maximum size for their containers.