

Vrksasana – Tree Pose

Pronounced vrick-shaah-suh-nuh the word vrksha means tree in Sanskrit

This pose reminds us of a tree because in the just the same way as a tree plants roots down into the ground for stability and lifts its branches upwards towards the light we must also simultaneously ground downwards and lift up towards the heavens. It also requires both strength and flexibility and since it is an asymmetrical pose we are challenged to be adaptable.



Teaching Points:

Start:

- Tadasana, Mountain Pose, finding balance & focus

Enter:

- We can balance our weight within our standing leg, equal weight between the sides of heels and the big toe and little toe, creating **pada bandha**, the foot lock.
- **Focus the eyes** in a soft 45° gaze upon an immovable object
- Place one foot to the inner thigh, stacking the standing leg hip over the standing leg knee, hands in the prayer position. Exert a little firm pressure through the bent leg foot against the thigh as you **engage your standing leg thigh muscles**, drawing the hip open. If our foot slips this is usually because we have not strengthened the standing leg and pressed firmly enough with the bent leg. *If needed keep the lower foot to the floor, or place upon the ankle, calf or mid thigh, avoiding the inner knee.*
- Ensure the **pelvis remains balanced**, perhaps imagining the pelvis to be a bowl containing water that must not be spilled. *We can allow the tailbone to drop downwards towards the floor to keep the lower back open if needed.*
- Simultaneously pressing downwards through the lower foot and lifting up through the crown, *we can stay here with hands in anjali mudra.*
- If possible reach outwards, lifting your arms above the head, placing palms together as you spread your elbows apart.
- We could flex arms further, keeping palms together, if so, keep shoulder blades down and tucked into the back, the neck free and open. For many students bent elbows is better if the structure of the shoulder prohibits a deeper flexion.

Stay:

- Stay here keeping the mind and breathing steady, gazing gently, with least effort.
- Make micro movements to stay balanced and steady. A **gentle mula bandha** can help keep the lengthening action of the body.

Exit:

- To exit, maintain steadiness on breath and mind and lower arms to prayer pose, foot to floor.
- Working to the other side.

Benefits:

Tones the postural muscles

Tones ankles and knees

Strengthen legs, arms and shoulders

Releases stiffness in neck and shoulders

Increases flexibility in hips and groin
Promotes deep breathing as it opens the chest
Creates feeling of confidence and independence
Increases mental focus and inner equipoise

Good preparation

Tadasana and simple balances, shoulder mobilizers and hip openers

Cautions

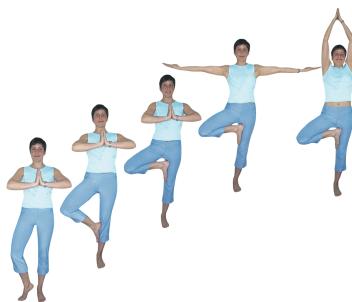
- High blood pressure & Heart Conditions: keep hands at heart level, or arms at shoulder level
- Balancing problems: keep lower foot to floor or fingertips against a wall

Simple versions and modifications



Supine tree

Here we come into tree in a supine pose. This is good preparation for a later standing tree.



Use staging by varying the positioning of the lower leg and the arms

Here you will see different options illustrated and when the tree is taught in this step by step way students can stay at the correct level. These provide many good modifications for different conditions and more inexperienced yoga students.

Variations & Developments

Arms Placements

We can place our arms in a variety of positions such as reaching out to sides or in a 'V' shape.

Partnerwork

We can hold hands with another student or make a group circle. An interesting pair practice is to stand side by side with the closest arm fully flexed, hands held, and the outer arms across the body so that each outer arm hand creates anjali mudra when placed together.

Blowing in the Breeze

We can come into the full pose and then gently wave from side to side.



Half lotus and curl

Here if you look along the sequence on the left from bottom to top you will see how we can move into a lying half lotus tree. This is an excellent way of introducing half lotus, although students must take care their bent knee and ankle is comfortable with the rotation coming from the hip. A softer version is shown to the right side

Half lotus tree: We can perform standing half lotus tree where the bent leg ankle is placed across the standing leg thigh although as before the bent leg knee and ankle must be comfortable with the rotation occurring at the hip, rather than overly twisting at the bent leg knee or ankle.

Bound half lotus tree: To intensify the pose we can go further from half lotus tree when bending the left leg by wrapping the left arm behind the body to hold the left big toe, then raising the right arm vertically. From here it is also possible to then progress into a forward bend maintaining the hold upon the left toe. This is a much more challenging pose and should only be taught when students are experienced with tree and standing forward bend and require an extra of intensity to engage mind and body!

Adjustments

Ideally we will verbally instruct to avoid unbalancing a student.