
Fruit Tree Planting and Care



So you have a new bare root stock fruit tree ready to be planted. The question is, how do you plant it and, once it's in the ground, how do you take care of it? Look no further, Burlington Permaculture is here to help!

Bare Root. So, what exactly is a bare root tree? Bare root stock trees are dormant trees that have been excavated and transported without any soil or a pot. They have a number of **advantages** over potted or root ball trees. These include:

- **More root mass.** Bare root trees can have more than twice the amount of roots that a balled or container tree would have.
- **Lower cost.** They are much lighter to ship than trees with heavy soil attached.
- **Easier planting.** A young tree without soil weighs little, so it's easy to move and plant.
- **Smooth Transition.** The trees will grow their new roots entirely in native soil, and not have to contend with transition between dissimilar soils, reducing stress on the tree.
- **Planting Time.** The ideal time to plant bare-root is mid spring (before budbreak) or mid fall (after leaf fall) – when other garden chores are not demanding your attention.

Before Planting. Before you put your tree into the ground it is important to find out how your soil drains. If it drains too slowly your tree will probably not fare well in that spot. To find out the rate of drainage you can:

- Dig a hole about 1 foot deep and fill it with water. Let it drain, and then fill it again!
- If it takes longer than 3 or 4 hours to drain on the 1st or 2nd filling, you have problems!
- Your choices at this point are: don't plant there, or try raising the tree up above the soil level, planting it on a slight mound.

Storage. Once they leave the nursery, bare root trees need to get in the ground or put into a temporary medium within a week at the longest. Delaying the planting or leaving the



roots uncovered increases the likelihood of weakening the tree and causing problems later. With no soil, the roots can dry out and die if left exposed for any time.

- When planting, soak the tree in water for 12 to 24 hours, and don't forget to remove packing materials.
- To store trees temporarily, place them in shade or an unheated building and cover the roots with something to keep them moist, such as wet shavings, newspapers or blanket.
- If you won't be able to plant the trees for more than two days, the trees should be "heeled in" by temporarily planting in a moist medium such as compost, wet shavings, sand, garden soil or a pile of wet leaves.

Planting.

Step 1. The first step in planting your fruit tree after letting its roots soak is site selection. Select a site with direct sunlight, and be sure to account for growth by allowing enough room between the planting site and buildings, trees, power lines or other obstructions. Be aware of microclimates, which, if pushing cold air, could lead to frost damage.

Step 2. Now it's time to dig a hole. This hole should be wider than seems necessary, probably about 3-4 feet, and must be large enough to allow the root system to spread without crowding. It is also recommended that any grass in a 3 foot radius from the center of the hole be removed. Also, try to turn the soil within that 3 foot radius to aid root growth and spread.

Step 3. Plant the tree at the same depth it stood in the nursery. Only the root system should be underground. Partially fill the hole, firming the soil around the lower roots. Do not add soil amendments.

Step 4. Fill the hole with the remaining soil. Pack the soil in the hole by gently stamping it with your feet. After the hole is filled, water the tree with two to five gallons of water, poured slowly enough so that the water doesn't run off.

Step 5. After this initial watering, place a 2-4 inch deep protective mulch area 3 feet in diameter around the base of the tree (but not touching the trunk). Any organic matter will work for a mulch. This will help to maintain consistent soil moisture.



Watering.

Watering the new tree is important to help get it started. Water the tree generously every week or 10 days during the first year. A good rule is to apply five gallons of water around the base of the tree every week of the growing season in which there is less than an inch of rainfall.

Further Care.

Fertilizer. Fertilizer is not necessary at planting time, but might be recommended for later in the growing season. After the tree has started to grow you can apply a nitrogen fertilizer. All fertilizer should be applied before mid-June

Staking. Some newly planted fruit trees will benefit from being staked. If gentle support is provided in the first season post planting, by tying to a cane (typically bamboo), use soft materials that do not chafe. On no account use string. The plant and cane must not be rigid. Bending gently in the wind causes stronger stems and more extensive roots to develop.

Additional Resources

For more information on trees and turf visit:
http://www.sustland.umn.edu/implement/trees_turf.html

This site offers a comprehensive guide to bare root stock planting and care:

<http://www.sandybarnursery.com/care-of-bareroot-trees.htm>

For pruning information visit the Arbor Day Foundation's website at:

<http://www.arborday.org/trees/pruning/>

This site is useful for all aspects of tree care:

http://www.thornhayes-nursery.co.uk/advice_planting.php