

Tree Planting Advice and Tips

About Bare Root Plants

Plants grown in the ground are sold during the winter months as either bare root plants (without any soil around the roots) or as root-balled plants (having some soil around the roots). Both may be safely planted during the winter period when the plants are dormant. There are seasonal variations from year to year however bare root planting usually starts around mid-November and ends around early April.

Purchasing Bare Root Plants and Equipment

Purchasing trees that are grown in the ground instead of pots and lifted when they are dormant in the late autumn and winter is less expensive than buying pot-grown trees. The trees and shrubs are easier to grow commercially and less-expensive to transport.

A range of tree protection, tree support, tree ties, mulches and weed membranes and fertilisers are available to purchase in order to support and protect the tree once it begins to grow again in the springtime.

Keeping Bare Root Plants in Good Condition and Ready for Planting

The roots need to be kept cold and damp until planting. Placing in a bucket of water for a few hours if they appear to be dry and then covering the roots with leaves, sacking etc. and placing in a cool area until ready to plant will ensure that the roots stay in good condition and the plant remains dormant. It's best to plant bare-root trees as soon as possible

If planting straight away, place the roots into water for about 30 minutes before planting.

Planting Bare Root Plants

The size and shape of the hole is a matter of opinion and whether to add compost to the hole or not is a matter of contention. Fertiliser can burn the roots; therefore placing it away from direct contact with the roots is important.

Dig the hole, either square, round or conical depending on the type of roots. Recent studies have shown that tree roots establish more quickly with a planting hole dug only two to three times the diameter of the root spread and just deep enough that the tree stands slightly higher than it did at the nursery.

To provide for easy root penetration, rough up the inside of the hole by poking it with a shovel and giving it a few twists.

Shovel enough loose soil back into the planting hole to create a mound on which to set the tree. Spread the roots atop the mound, adjusting the mound's height so that the top of the root ball stands slightly higher in the soil, to allow for settling, than it stood before it was dug up. Once you have the tree in place, throw a shovelful of soil over the roots to steady the trunk.

As you backfill the hole use a stick or your fingers to work the soil in among the roots. Slightly bounce the plant periodically to settle the soil, and adjust the positioning of the tree as necessary. When you have finished backfilling, build up a slight ridge of soil around the outer edge of the planting hole to help contain water. Step back and look at the tree to make sure it's standing straight. Then remove any dead, diseased, or crossing branches. Thoroughly soak the ground beneath a new tree. Continue watering weekly for the first year.

Mulch mats, coir mats will insulate the roots and suppress weeds. If you use mulch, keep it away from the trunk to prevent the trunk from rotting. Some sort of covering around the base of the tree will prevent freezing and thawing of soil (which could heave plants out of the ground in winter) and keep roots cool and moist through summer.

Protecting and Staking Your Tree

Tree spiral guards and tree shelters protect the tree from rodents. A tree stake or two will prevent the tree from growing out of its vertical position. Use tree belts or ties that won't damage the tree trunk. Trees over 3 feet high or in very windy sites should be staked for a year until their roots grab firm hold of the soil. Fasten the trunk to one or two stakes set beside the tree. Slowly and thoroughly soak the ground beneath the plant, and allow the water to seep in. Then soak the ground again.

Aftercare - Tree Maintenance

Throughout its first growing season, maintain a weekly watering schedule. Figure on about a gallon per week per square-foot-spread of the roots. Keeps the mulched circle weed-free, adding more mulch as needed, for at least a few years.