

Part 2

PLANTING, TRAINING & PRUNING

Planting a fruit tree

Plant fruit trees in winter, so the roots can get established before the leaves start to grow. For frost-tender plants (e.g. subtropicals and some citrus), wait until spring, when the worst frosts are over.

- Prepare the site first – clear all weeds and grass from an area about 1m square.
- Soak the tree (up to two hours maximum) in a bucket of water before removing the bag or pot.
- Prune off any damaged pieces of root. If the roots are circling around the root ball, slice them from top to bottom in several places with a sharp blade, so new roots will grow outwards instead of continuing in a circle.

1. Prepare the planting hole

- Dig a large hole, about half a metre deep, piling the soil near the edge of the hole. Keep the topsoil separate from the subsoil so you can replace them in the same order.
- Mix some well-rotted organic matter (e.g. compost, old sawdust) into the pile of soil.
- Loosen the bottom and sides of the hole with a fork. Add gypsum if you're planting into clay.

2. Place the plant on a mound

- Put a pile of the mixture in the middle of the hole and place the tree on top of it, carefully spreading the roots. On poorly drained soil, build up the planting mound to 0.5m above the normal soil level.
- Check that the tree is straight and will be buried to the same level as before.
- Make sure the grafting union is well above the soil level.
- For a free-standing tree, drive in stakes on two sides so you can support it for the first two years.

3. Fill in the hole

- Carefully fill in the soil around the roots, filling any air pockets, firming the soil down, and watering a little as you go.
- On a dry slope, make sure the soil is level so that rainwater stays in the root zone.

4. Firm the soil and stake the tree

- When the hole is full, press the soil down with your heel.
- Use flexible ties (e.g. old pantyhose, strips of bike inner tube) to tie the tree to the stakes. Check them regularly to make sure they're not restricting growth.

5. Water and mulch

- Water the soil well.
- Spread rotted manure or compost over the soil and cover with mulch. Leave a clear space around the trunk so it doesn't rot.
- For the first year or two, water the tree regularly and deeply during dry periods, and keep the area weed free.

6. Trim the branches

- Prune to shape the tree. If it has a lot of branches but a small root ball, prune off about a third of the branches to help the tree adjust while it forms new roots.

The mulched planting hole

