



# Planting & Care of Fruit Trees

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Growing fruit for a hobby can provide food and fun for the family as well as add beauty to the home landscape. There is more to growing fruit than making the planting and harvesting the crop, however. Many exacting cultural requirements are a must if quality fruit is to be produced.

## FRUIT TREE PLANTING

1. Plant about a month after the first killing frost in the fall or about a month before the last killing frost in the spring.

2. Select a planting site that has good air drainage, full sunlight and deep, well drained soil.

3. The soil should be well prepared prior to planting. Take advantage of the Soil Testing Service available through your local Cooperative Extension Service, and apply needed lime and fertilizer. In a lawn, spade up the areas to be planted, and work in these amendments.

4. Never expose the roots of nursery trees to freezing or drying conditions. If not planted immediately, trees should be held dormant in refrigerated storage or "heeled in" a trench of moist soil in a shady location.

5. When the soil is dry enough for proper planting, dig each hole large enough to accommodate the roots without bending. Hold the tree in place so that the bud union is 2 to 3 inches above ground level. Begin filling the hole, first with pulverized top soil and then the subsoil. Tamp backfill soil thoroughly to eliminate air pockets. Before the hole is completely filled with soil, add 2 gallons of water.

6. At planting, fruit trees should be headed back to 30" above the ground. Remove all damaged limbs. This procedure allows branches to form at desired levels, improves the strength of the tree and provides a balance between the top and the roots.

## CARE OF FRUIT TREES DURING THE EARLY YEARS

Apply nitrogen 2 weeks after planting. Each year thereafter apply a complete fertilizer in April. Apply water as needed at the rate of 2 to 3 gallons per tree. Keep an area at least 2 feet away from the tree free of grasses and weeds. A mulch can help control weeds and conserve soil moisture. Even though the tree will not bear fruit for a number of years, it is important to develop a good insect and disease control program soon after planting.

Spending a few extra hours to shape the tree during the early years will pay off in later years. Apple and pear trees are pruned to a central leader system which allows 3 to 4 groups of four branches to develop. The central leader is cut in February or March at 18-24 inches above the last group of limbs to insure the development of more limbs. Prune peach, nectarine, apricot, cherry and plum trees to an open center system. After the first year of growth, 3 to 4 branches are chosen and all limbs in the center of the tree are removed.

For further information on home fruit production, contact your county Extension agent for information about the Home Orchard Management bulletin OM 100.