



Open Orchard Project Fact Sheet

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PLANTING AND CARING FOR FRUIT TREES

A. Care of Trees before planting

If in containers, place trees in a position that has direct sunlight for at least half the day and protection from strong winds. Water weekly. Bare rooted trees need to be tucked into damp soil ensuring the roots are well covered on a very flat angle makes this easier. They can be buried like this in bunches. They will need to be planted out within a couple of weeks.

B. Site Preparation

If possible, site preparation should begin six months prior to planting

1. Fence off the proposed orchard - protect the fruit trees from animals.
2. Pre-dig the holes early and put a good bucketful of manure or compost in the hole then cover with the soil. (or use well rotted manure at time of planting)
3. Test for drainage - Fruit trees don't thrive in poorly drained soil. Dig a 30 cm hole and fill it up with water - it should drain away completely in less than three hours. If soil is has poor drainage, mounding of tree site will improve drainage as well as increase depth of topsoil. Making a mound of earth can also enable trees to thrive in shallow soil.
4. Green manure crops improve the organic matter content of soil and can be dug in approx. one month prior to planting.
5. Windbreak trees are very important and should be planted before fruit trees. Windbreaks should be planted east/south/west of the orchard, leaving the north side open.

C. Planting the trees

Bare rooted trees need to be planted in the winter while the trees are dormant. Potted up trees can be planted out at most times of the year, provided the following points are followed:

1. Watering - trees should be watered thoroughly several hours before planting to moisten the root ball. Planting trees out with the root ball dry or partially dry will result in roots being damaged. The site should also be thoroughly watered the day before planting.
2. Digging the hole - make a hole in the prepared spot or mound twice the width of the pot or roots and the same depth as the pot. With an unprepared hole dig down 60cm and loosen the soil really well all around before you plant and add in some well rotted manure or compost.
3. Root care Remove the tree from the pot and lightly tease roots down the side of the root ball and loosen any matted roots at base of root balls. If there is any roots that are way over long you can prune them back carefully- this makes sure the tree grows evenly as well.
4. Make a mound for the roots and spread them evenly over the mound- it is a good idea to face the strongest roots to the SW so the tree will grow more evenly all around.
5. Planting Fill in soil around roots, making sure not to plant root ball any more than 2cm lower than it was in the container and make sure the graft is at least 3cm above ground level. Trees will suffer if planted too deep. Also check the tree is standing vertical a couple of times during the process! Soil should be firmed down well after planting.
6. Watering At least 20 litres of water should be applied to each tree to settle in soil around roots. A saucer shaped depression 50cm in diameter will help hold water when watering in.
7. Mulching the trees with old straw, hay etc, will stop soil from drying out, heating up, stops weeds from germinating and also adds valuable organic matter. Do not apply mulch against trunk of tree as collar rots may occur. Leave 20cm space around trunk. Trees that are susceptible to frost damage are better off without mulch during the winter months, the reason being that bare soil kept moist will absorb heat during the day and radiate this heat at night reducing severity of frost.
8. Pruning You should prune now to start shaping the tree and give it a strong base to build from. It protect it from wind damage especially to stop the roots being rocked.
9. Staking All dwarf and semi dwarf trees need staking. Best way is a thin post at either side of the tree half a metre away and use some party-hose or rubber tubing to gently tie it in place.
10. Ph Test If soil is acid apply dolomite or lime.



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D. Care after planting

1. **Weed Control** - Most important if trees are to grow quickly. Weeds and especially grass should not be allowed to grow within one metre of the tree for the first year. After this keep area out to the drip line (i.e. width of foliage) free of weeds. Mulch will control most weeds.
2. **Fertilising** - trees will respond to feeding. How often and how much fertiliser to apply will depend on soil type and the trees requirements . You can apply any combination of organic fertilizers (e.g. poultry manure, rock phosphate, blood and bone, seaweed etc) around in a large doughnut at the drip line. This encourages the roots to grow out and be a strong base. A living fertilizer system can be created by planting 4cm pieces of comfrey root at half metre intervals at the expected final drip line of the tree (just drop them by opening up a small gap with a spade. They have long tap roots that will bring up the nutrients from the sub soils and they naturally die of the first frost of the autumn to feed the soil.
3. **Mulching** - the use of organic mulch is very important for healthy trees. Any organic material can be used, e.g. lawn clippings, weeds, straw etc. Hay, especially lucerne hay is excellent. As the mulches break down they will feed the tree with valuable nutrients. ALWAYS keep mulch away from the tree trunk!
4. **Watering** - In most of Southland once trees are planted watering is not required except in times of drought – A good soak once a week would be enough in those conditions. However if you live in a dry or very free draining area setting up a permanent under-tree sprinkler irrigation system is well worth considering. Frequency and amount of watering will depend on a number of factors, but a good watering once a week is a good guideline.
5. **De-suckering** - remove any shoots coming from below graft on grafted trees while trees are young. The removal promotes growth of grafted variety only.
6. **Pruning** -Fruit trees need pruning to produce good crops of fruit as well as keep trees to a manageable size. Most deciduous fruit trees in particular need annual pruning. Pruning also invigorates the tree and encourages new fruiting wood for the following year.

