

Planting fruit trees & bushes

You have just bought a high quality fruit tree/bush, capable of providing you with years of delicious harvests. So what do you do next?

These notes will help you give your plants the best possible organic start to life.

When you get home

If the tree is bare-rooted, it is important that plant roots do not dry out. If you are not going to plant immediately, just plant the trees or bushes temporarily, 'heel them in', in a spare bit of ground. Alternatively, wrap the roots in wet newspaper or hessian covered in plastic, until you have time to heel them in or plant them. In this case keep them in a frost-free but cool shed or garage.

Soil preparation for planting trees

1. Ideally, as these plants will be in the same spot for many years, you should have your soil analysed to find out how fertile it is, and if it is short of any particular mineral. For a list of analysis services see our organic factsheet on [Soil Analysis](#).
2. If your soil is a heavy clay or silt, cultivate an area two or three times as large as the final planting hole. This is to help prevent water draining into and filling the hole.
3. If your soil drains well and is reasonably fertile you will only need to prepare planting holes one metre in diameter. Where soil is poor, it is advisable to prepare a larger area.
4. If you are planting into grass, dig the turf in. It contains valuable humus and nutrients. Otherwise, add leafmould or another low nutrient soil improver at the rate of two shovels full per planting hole.
5. Also, to each square metre of prepared soil add: 5kg (1 spadeful) manure or 10kg garden compost; 125g bonemeal; 65g hoof and horn; 65g seaweed meal.

Soil preparation for soft fruit bushes

1. Ideally, as these plants will be in the same spot for many years, you should have your soil analysed to find out how fertile it is, and if it is short of any particular mineral. For a list of analysis services see our organic factsheet on [Soil Analysis](#).
2. Prepare an area large enough to take all the bushes that are to be planted, and leave a clear perimeter of 60-75cms (2-2½ft) clear of grass and weeds.
3. Raspberries, blackcurrants - add manures and fertilisers as for trees.
4. Gooseberries and redcurrants - as for trees but use compost rather than manure. Then only add bonemeal (at 125g per m²) unless your soil analysis indicates other shortages.

Planting

Trees and bushes, with the exception of blackcurrants, should be planted no deeper than the original soil mark. It is particularly important with fruit trees not to bury the graft union. Blackcurrants should be planted 5cm (2ins) deeper than previously.

Water trees well after planting, then apply a mulch.

Staking trees

Apples on rootstocks M27 and M9 will need staking for their entire lives. All other fruit trees will need a stake for the first 4 to 5 years. Stakes should be 1.2m long with 45cms driven into the ground. Use proper ties to secure trees.

Initial pruning

There are many good books on fruit pruning and one of these should be consulted for best results. To form an open-centre bush fruit tree, maidens should be pruned to a bud at 75-90cms, leaving four buds pointing away from each other to grow out into a framework of branches. Blackcurrants should be pruned back to two buds above soil level.

During the first summer

It is vital to provide enough water to your new fruit plantings during the growing season, and also to keep them free of weeds. Water regularly if the weather is dry. A mulch - of old newspaper (at least 8 pages thick) or cardboard covered with straw, grass mowings or leafmould for example - will help to conserve moisture and suppress weeds.

Further reading

- **The Fruit Garden Displayed** (*RHS*) - *H.A. Baker*
- **Pruning Hardy Fruits** (*RHS*) - *Jack Woodward*