

How to Plant a Fruit Tree Sheet

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DO – Plant your bare root trees as soon as possible or sooner.

DO – Wait till after the last frost date (usually toward the end of Feb) to plant your potted citrus.

So you have decided to adopt a tree from our Annual fruit tree day. Congratulations. Now what do you do with it? Glad you asked.

Before you begin...for those of you who are doing bare root trees. It is a good idea to soak the tree in a bucket of water for an hour or two. This will help invigorate the roots. As an added bonus you can add root stimulator to the water. When you are done planting use this water to water your new tree.

1. Hole size. You want the tree hole to be 1.5 to 2 times bigger than the root ball. In the case of the citrus that will be 1.5 to 2 times bigger than the pot it comes in. For bare root trees it is a little different. You will need to visualize how big a pot the tree would fit in and make the hole 1.5 to 2 times bigger. The main reason you dig it bigger is to loosen the soil so the roots can grow more easily through it.

2. Hole contents. It is a good idea to primarily use the soil that came out of the hole to fill it back. Then you want to use some organic compost in the hole to help keep the soil from compacting and to enrich the soil. Use 25% organic mulch, but don't use any fertilizer at this point as it could burn the roots if it comes in direct contact.

3. Do you have gophers??? Yes? Continue to read. No! Skip to number 4. The most effective way to keep gophers from your new tree roots is to line the tree hole with chicken wire from your local hardware store. I have been told that 18" wide wire will do it but I use 24" and line the entire hole. The tree has an opportunity to establish itself before the wire decomposes and once established the gophers can't do as much damage.

4. Pruning your new tree.

Bare root - This always freaks people out, but you need to severely prune your new tree before you plant it. Why? Because by digging it up and moving it you have done a severe prune on the roots so you have to balance the tree by pruning the top. If you don't prune the top the roots will have to struggle too much to support the top and your tree will have less of a chance to survive. Trust me on this one.

Start by removing any broken or damaged top branches and roots. It is especially important to check the roots. You then can remove up to 70% of the top branches. Take a deep breath, it is needed and can only help your new tree thrive. There is a method to this so get some instruction from our helpful assistants here.

Citrus - You really don't need to bother pruning much. Remove any damaged or broken limbs and then leave it alone. For future reference the only time that you really need to prune a citrus is to remove dead branches and to shape it.

5. The next step is to correctly place the tree in the hole so. There is a place on your new tree that is called the graft point. This is the point where the root stock and the fruiting stock were grafted together. You will notice that there are two sides to it...one that looks more susceptible to damage and one that looks much sturdier. You will want to point the side that looks more susceptible away from the sun as it will sunburn very easily. In the desert this usually has it pointing North and a little East...then a little more East.

6. Once you have placed the tree in the hole the right direction and begin sprinkling the dirt that you removed from the hole back over the roots making sure that there are no air pockets. As you continue to fill the hole you can add mulch to the mix, which helps the soil not compact so much and adds organic material.

7. Planting suggestion for those of you who do not have flood irrigation. It is important that you deep water your tree periodically (see watering your new fruit tree.) Once the hole is filled in it is a good idea to create a tree well under the tree by building a 3" to 5" berm in a circle all the way around the tree to where you project the tree drip line to be. I usually make it several feet out from the trunk. This will assist you in keeping the water near the tree and builds a barrier to help keep the mulch in (covered below.)

8. So now your tree is planted. Water it. Flood the well and then flood it again. Then start watering per the directions below.

9. To keep your new adoptee in tiptop shape there are several things that you can do.

Watering - Fruit trees need to have some dry out time in between each watering. A good watering schedule is every two weeks from March 1 to October 31 and once every four weeks November 1 to Feb 29. Don't water every week as it promotes weak roots. Also it is best to NOT have your trees on the same watering system as your garden veggies and flowers, which are watered periodically and promote shallow root growth in trees.

Building soil - It is important to build soil around the base of your tree, the healthier the soil the healthier the tree. It also helps keep bad bug populations down. I suggest that inside the tree well you lay down a thick 3" to 5" layer of organic mulch, bark or wood chips and work it in to the soil that is already there to a depth of 6 inches. It is also a good idea to add to this every year.

Fertilize - The first year add 1 pound of organic granules to the tree well per inch diameter of trunk and work it in with a trowel. This way the fertilizer is watered in slowly and does not burn the roots.

Future fertilizing

Bare Root Trees - Best time to fertilize bare root fruit trees is just after the flush of new leaves arrives in Jan/Feb timeframe then Fertilize on Valentines, Memorial Day or Labor Day. Follow the directions on the fertilizer for how much. You can either add it to the tree well and work it in or use the shovel to make small holes in the tree well and pour it in. Make sure to do this a little ways away from the tree as to not burn the roots.

Citrus - Fertilize on Valentines, Memorial Day or Labor Day. Follow the directions on the fertilizer for how much. You can either add it to the tree well and work it in or use the shovel to make small holes in the tree well and pour it in. Make sure to do this a little ways away from the tree as to not burn the roots.

Protect the trunk - MOST IMPORTANT

Ever wondered why the trunks of some trees are painted white? This is to help protect the trunk from the summer sun. It is typically only done to citrus although all new trees need to have their trunks protected.

I have used cardboard boxes in the past. I don't like putting paint on trees that produce fruit that I am going to eat.

You can also build a tent with posts and shade cloth. This is the best choice if you can do it.