



# A36 Planting a tree



Planting a tree is such a pleasure. Knowing your tree will live for many years is very special, especially when planted by the school community for the enjoyment of everyone. This activity has step by step instructions for planting and looking after a young tree. This method is good practice for any tree regardless of how they will be pruned and trained (A61).

## Resources

- Fruit tree/s
- Tools including spade, fork, shovel, wheelbarrow, watering can, hammer
- Compost (bought or homemade), stake, tree tie, tree guard

## Activity

- 1 Carefully select your tree based on variety, pollination group, rootstock, and spacing/training. A specialist fruit nursery or good garden centre will be able to advise you. See also S3.4.
- 2 Plant your tree following instructions on the next page. Plant 'pot-grown' trees at any time of year unless the soil is waterlogged, frozen or during drought. Plant 'bare root' trees when dormant from late autumn to early spring, avoiding freezing weather. These are usually cheaper, easier to handle and available in a wider choice of varieties.

## Extended activities

- 1 Write a maintenance plan for your trees, eg watering, weeding, checking the tree tie, pruning, etc.
- 2 Design an orchard. Begin raising funds to buy more trees. See SG2.6 for ideas. Invite local people to help with planting trees. Invite local media. See SG2.4 for ideas about sending a press release.

### Top tip



### Planting other fruit

The instructions on the next page for planting a tree also apply to fruit bushes, cane fruit and grape vines.

Just check for any specific details for each fruit, eg they may not need staking, blackcurrants are planted 5cm lower than the original soil level, etc. See the Food Growing Instruction Cards for details of spacing, etc.



## Health & Safety

Follow safe practices when using digging tools and other tools such as mallets, keeping a safe working distance apart. Follow Manual Handling guidelines for lifting heavy pots (SG1.3).

See also *Health and Safety Guidelines (Section SG1.2)*

## Further information

- A61 Pruning and training fruit
- S3.4 Planting fruit
- G4.10 Pruning and training fruit
- Food Growing Instruction Cards

## Instructions for planting a tree

- 1** Pot grown tree: prepare your tree by watering well and leave to drain.  
Bare root tree: soak in water for five minutes.  
Plant promptly once removed from water as it's vital roots do not dry out in the sun/wind.  
If there is any delay during planting, cover with moist sacking or plant temporarily in a spare bit of soil at a 45° angle ('heeling in').
- 2** Prepare the planting hole.
  - Remove any weeds and grass. See A14 for technique, including for uses of turf.
  - Mark out the planting hole with a spade. This should be twice the width of the rootball in well drained soil and three/four times in poor. The extra width helps water drain more easily, so the planting hole doesn't become waterlogged.
- 3** Dig the hole to the same depth as the rootball, eg 30cm. A square, rather than round hole is easier to dig and crucial for poorly drained clay soils (A9). These soils can 'hold' the shape of the hole once backfilled, so a round shape acts like a giant pot forcing roots to grow round and round at the bottom. Square shapes have corners instead where roots break out of the shape and establish properly by spreading further.
- 4** Add three shovelfuls of compost. Fork one into the bottom of the hole and spread the other two on the spare soil.  
Note: for extra fertility in poorer soils (see A9), you can add a handful of general organic fertiliser, especially one high in phosphorous to encourage root growth.
- 5** Remove the tree from its pot, pressing down on the sides to loosen. Pull out gently. If roots are congested at the bottom, then gently loosen to stop roots going round and round. This causes some damage, but is far better than the roots continuing to grow in circles and not establishing properly.  
If bare rooted, remove from bucket.



- 6 Move the tree into the hole. Check the planting depth will be the same as the original soil level in the pot. This is important to prevent rot and not bury the 'graft' union (S3.4). A fork handle or bamboo cane laid across the hole will help line up levels.

**Note:** if planting a bare root tree, the original soil level will be marked by a darker coloured band on the trunk.

- 7 Hold the tree straight. Start backfilling the soil, gently shaking the tree to allow soil to settle at intervals and lightly firming soil with your heel to avoid large air pockets. Step back and check position before firmed too tightly.

- 8 Use a 5cm diameter stake at a 45° angle to the trunk with the stake leaning into the prevailing wind. Hammer in, being careful to avoid the roots. Use a tree tie to make a figure of eight shape with one loop around the trunk and another around the stake. The rubber cushion should rest between so the stake doesn't damage the bark.

- 9 Finish backfilling soil and firming. Water and mulch with 'mulch mats' or compost.



Water thoroughly. Try moulding soil into a 'dish' to stop water running off before it has a chance to soak in.



Spread 5cm of compost on the soil surface to conserve moisture and suppress weeds (A39). Leave 15cm space around trunk to prevent rotting.

### Looking after your tree

- Keep area free of competition by removing weeds and grass. These otherwise seriously impede establishment.
- Wrap a rabbit guard around the trunk to protect the bark
- Water in dry weather; usually one or two 4.5 litre watering cans per tree every week. Don't water every day as this encourages vulnerable surface rooting. You can water into wide pipe/bottles sunk next to tree, positioned just above soil level, so water will go direct to roots.
- Check the tie often. A common cause of tree death is strangulation, so loosen regularly.

