

Fruit Tree Planting Instructions - Potted

The first few years of a tree's life have a big influence on its health and hardiness. All the trees produced at ISSA have been grown organically and given first-class care and attention.

Potted trees may be planted at any time of year. You can leave the tree in its pot through winter if you would prefer to plant in springtime. Leave outdoors in a sunny place but sheltered from heavy wind. Planted trees are not in danger of frost damage, but trees in pots should be brought into a barn or garage to protect from extreme frosts below minus 5 °C.

During summer months potted trees may be planted – but be aware that they are actively photosynthesising so they have a high demand for water. Freshly planted trees may not make good contact with soil moisture for several months. Check regularly and water thoroughly on a weekly basis if necessary. This may apply even during a wet summer in free draining soil.

Well-Drained soil

Fruit trees do not grow well in wet or very acid soil. Before you decide where to plant, dig a test hole about 50cm deep and fill with water. If it takes any longer than 90 mins to drain then it is an unsuitable site.

If your soil is boggy or acid you can add wood ash or slow-release lime such as calcified seaweed. These will help to neutralize the soil acidity and also feed your young tree with nutrients needed for stable growth.

Plant the fruit tree in a raised mound for better drainage. The mound should be 6 to 10 inches high at its centre sloping gently to surrounding ground level for a radius of at least 1 metre.

Weed competition

Fruit trees feed almost exclusively in the top soil. They do not have deep tap roots. Therefore they compete for nutrients with grass and other vigorous herbaceous plants. In the first few years of a tree's life its root system is unable to compete with grass or vigorous weeds, therefore it is essential to keep a radius of at least 1 metre completely weed free around the young tree. As the tree grows, this mulched area should increase to encompass the entire area directly under its branches (the "drip line")

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Dwarf trees must have weed-free conditions in their root-zone for all their lives. Standard trees may be able to compete with grass and weeds when in their mature stage (when they have reached their full height and come into good fruit bearing). But best fruit growing requires weed control and annual soil improvement through mulching and small nutritional additions.

Shelter

Apple trees are tolerant of moderate wind. For very exposed sites a shelter belt of trees or a hedge should be planted. Shelter should protect from turbulent wind **but not shadow** and **not create root competition**. Don't plant the tree close to other large trees or hedges, they will overshadow the apple tree and rob it of light & soil nutrients.

Staking

Dwarf trees must be staked all their lives. Larger rootstocks may be able to grow without staking. It is advisable to assess the wind exposure of a site to determine the necessity. Inspect and check how the young tree is coping with strong winds. Stake if necessary.

Position the stake on the side of the prevailing wind. Use a strong **round** stake, 6 to 8 feet high. It is best to put the stake in before planting the tree. Plant with the stem 3 to 6 inches from the stake.

Use a tree tie or other strong but moderately flexible material. Do not 'choke' the tree by tying too tightly. The tree tie should be inspected twice yearly and loosened as the tree grows thicker.

Soil Improvement

Too much nitrogenous nutrition is as bad as too little. If a tree grows too fast (too much green growth) it may be susceptible to disease, canker in particular. The optimal growth is slow and steady. It is more important to keep the root zone weed free than to fertilize.

If soil is poor, you may add **well-rotted** farm yard manure (crumbly composted state). Add no more than two fork fulls – mix well with the top soil from the planting hole to create a fertilized, loose, crumbly soil. Annual minimal soil improvement through mulching and weeding is better than a once-off feed.

Other additions that may improve the balance of minor nutrients to the soil: one or two fistfuls of seaweed dust, or fish/bone meal.

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Digging

Plant the tree by digging a hole wider and deeper than the pot or root system. This helps to loosen the soil for future easy root establishment. If the topsoil is shallow, break up the clay or rock beneath the planting hole for better root penetration. Best to rake or loosen the sides with a fork to create a looser and more irregular surface for tender roots to enter.

Always plant in dry weather. Be aware that a hole with loose soil is likely to drain water from surrounding water-logged or compacted ground, thus creating wet conditions in the trees root-zone. In this case it is best not to plant in early winter while the tree is dormant and not actively drawing up soil moisture – better to plant in spring time, when the tree is just beginning to commence transpiration.

Make a mound above the ground, as the loose soil will sink with time and you must avoid creating a 'bowl' effect which could fill with water.

Plant the tree to the same soil level as it was nursed – just above the root level. There is usually a colour difference at this point of transition from soil level to over ground level. Keep the graft union above soil level to prevent the variety from developing its own roots. If planting a potted tree sprinkle a 1cm layer of soil over the pot compost level to prevent it drying out (1cm layer is sufficient).

Spread out the roots in all directions. Fill the hole and stand gently on the earth to stabilize the tree and tie it securely to the stake. Water the tree well to enable the roots to make good contact with the soil. If planting during summer months be sure to regularly check that the tree is not suffering from a temporary drought – water if necessary.

Tree guarding

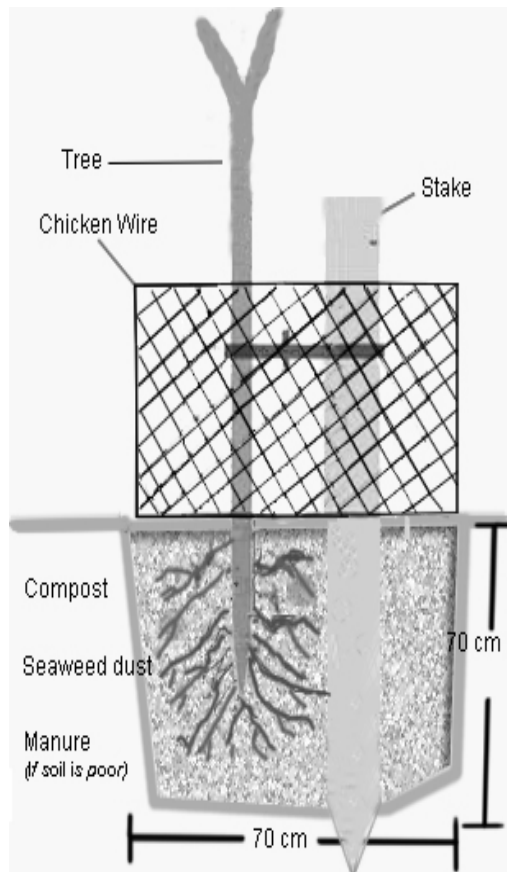
Cattle, horses and deer should never be allowed to graze an orchard. In the case of deer, fence the entire orchard (height: 2.5-3 metres). Sheep should only be allowed to graze an orchard when the trees are established and their lower branches are high enough to be out of reach. Guard the lower trunk from bark stripping as described below.

Use a tree guard or chicken wire to protect the lower trunk from strip barking by hares or rabbits. Necessary for the first few years of the trees life. Once the tree is well established (after several years) there may no longer be a need for this protection. Be careful that the tree guard does not cause damp conditions around the base of the trunk. Weed regularly to keep clean and dry.

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Companion Planting

Certain plants are considered beneficial companions to your apple trees - climbing nasturtiums, horseradish, calendula and wild (ramson) garlic. They may be grown close to the trees. Remember to leave some room around the trunk for ventilation.



Suggested Further Learning:

- *Read a book on fruit growing*
- *Enlist the help of a knowledgeable friend*
- *Attend a fruit growing workshop*

ISSA offer half-day and full day courses on fruit growing topics such as: 'Pruning', 'Grafting', 'Planting', 'Maintenance' ... plus many more.

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(discounts for ISSA subscribers).

Courses involve both theory and practical demonstration.

Participants practice their new skills on ISSA trees to improve technique and correct mistakes before going home.

Rootstock Information

M27 – Extreme dwarfing

Grow up to 1.8 m (6 feet); fruit within 3 yrs. Requires good soil, regular feeding, watering and its root-zone to be kept weed-free. Plant 2m apart or in large pot.

M9 - Dwarfing

Grow to 2.2m (8 feet). Requires good staking. Root-zone to be kept weed-free. Plant 2.5 metres apart or in a large pot.

M26 – Semi-dwarfing

Grow to 3m (10 feet) and fruit in 3-4 years. Plant 3m apart.

MM106 – Semi-Vigorous

Grow to 4.5 m (15 feet) and fruit in 5 yrs approx. Plant 5 m apart.

MM111 & M25 – Very vigorous

Grow to 5 m plus. Tolerate poorer soils. Plant at least 6 m apart. Fruit in 6 to 8 yrs.

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