

# PLANTING YOUR Bare-Root Fruit Tree



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*Many fruit trees are purchased as bare-root trees. A bare-root tree is a dormant tree that has no soil or planting medium around the roots. Here are some tips on storing, planting, and caring for your bare-root fruit tree.*

## Before Planting

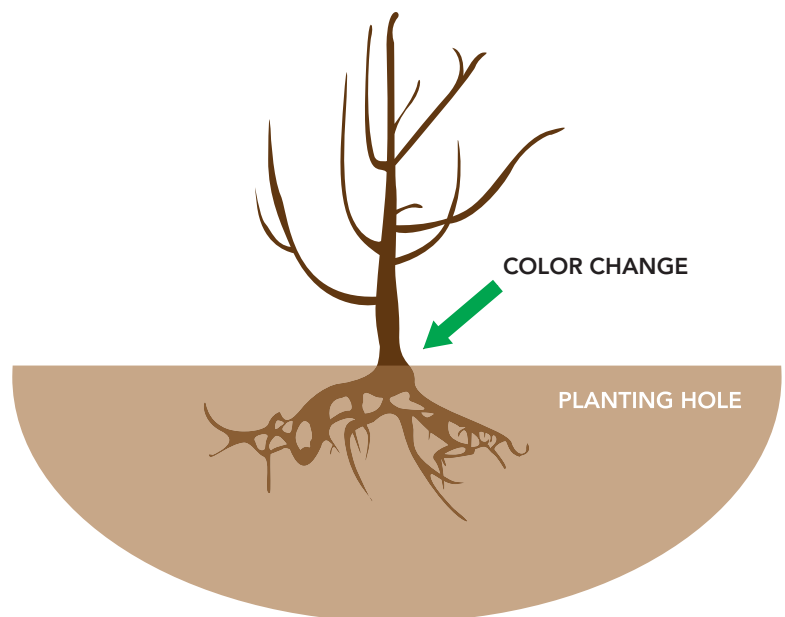
It will not survive if the roots dry out. If the tree cannot be planted in a permanent location immediately, the best alternative is to temporarily plant it in a pot or in a mound of moist soil, compost, or mulch. This temporary planting is called “heeling in.” Do not put the tree in a bucket of water; this cuts off all essential oxygen to the roots and can damage or kill the tree. Do not put the unplanted tree or bush in hot sun. Sun and heat will dry roots quickly and can cause stress or death. Store potted or heeled in trees in partial shade or under shade cloth and keep them moist.

## Selecting a Location

Fruit trees require a location with well-drained soil that receives 8 to 10 hours of direct sunlight daily. Fruit trees will not produce fruit when grown in the shade.

## Planting

Dig a hole at least twice as wide as the diameter of the root spread. For example, if the root spread is 10 inches, dig a hole with a 20-inch diameter. The hole should be deep enough to accommodate the full length of the roots, without bending them (Figure 1). Spread the roots out and do not wrap them around in a circle inside the hole.



**Figure 1.** The hole should be twice as wide as the root spread and deep enough so the roots do not bend.

Look at the trunk of your tree to determine how deeply it was planted in the nursery. There will be a color change on the trunk or stem where it transitions from light colored root tissue to dark or brown stem tissue (Figure 2). Plant the tree no deeper than it was in the nursery.

It is not necessary to add soil amendments. In fact, research shows that your tree will do just fine in our native soil provided the soil clods are broken up before backfilling into the planting hole. If you choose to add soil amendments, add amendments to the entire planting area (not just the hole) and till them into the native soil. Do not add granular fertilizer into the hole as it may damage the new roots.

Spread the roots out and slowly backfill the hole around the roots. Gently tamp down the soil around the roots to remove any air pockets. Water the tree deeply. In the absence of rain, water it deeply every 10 to 14 days.

Apply mulch to the soil surface 2-4 inches deep.

Spread the mulch out at least as far as the tree's drip line (the area underneath the outermost edge of the tree's canopy) and taper the mulch down as it approaches the trunk. Do not pile the mulch onto the base of the tree.

Generally bare-root trees are small and will not need staking. If the tree is exposed to heavy winds or is top heavy, it may need staking to keep it from repositioning itself. Stop by your local Extension office for information on proper staking techniques.

## Care

Now that your tree is planted, it should be pruned or trained before new growth occurs. This will encourage fruit production. Visit UGA Extension's publication site ([extension.uga.edu/publications](https://extension.uga.edu/publications)) and search for publications that provide information on the care of your specific tree. There are several home garden tree guides, including care sheets on figs, apples, pears, pomegranates, persimmons and plums. These publications contain up-to-date and research-based information.



**Figure 2.** Note the color change between the root and the trunk. Plant the tree no deeper than this mark.

*Photo credit: Mary Carol Sheffield*



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