FRUITSHARE

~ FRUIT TREES FOR SCHOOLS ~

A GUIDE TO PLANTING AND CARING FOR YOUR NEW FRUIT TREES

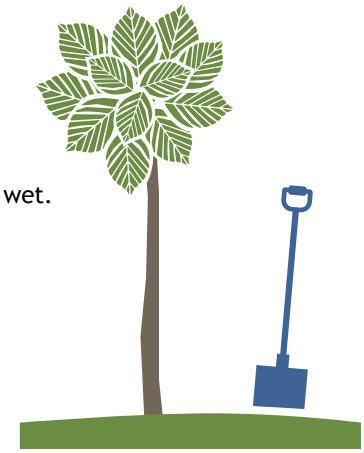
****PLEASE UNPACK YOUR LIVE TREES STRAIGHT AWAY TO GIVE THEM THE BEST CHANCE OF SURVIVAL!****

If you can't plant them straight away:

- Store them upright in a cool, dry and frost-free place (such as a shed or garage)
- If your trees have bare roots (no soil around them/aren't in pots), spray the roots with a fine mist of water. If they have come in compost, spray the compost with some water.
- 'Heel' the trees into a single hole in the ground in their bundles until you're ready to plant them.

TO PLANT YOUR TREES

You should plant your new fruit trees between mid-November and the end of March. Make sure you don't plant the tree in frozen or boggy wet soil.



- Dig a small hole in the ground with a spade – about 60cm wide (the hole needs to be a bit wider and deeper than the roots of the tree).
- If there is grass where you are digging, carefully dig it up and put aside.
- Loosen the soil at the bottom and sides of the hole, especially if the soil is hard or wet.
- You can add some compost to the hole if you have it, but don't worry if you don't.
- Carefully place the tree into the hole and then fill the space with extra soil, keeping hold of the tree.
- Press down the soil as you add it around the tree.
- If you have grass set aside, cut it in half and place it upside down around the base of the tree.
- Then you can water the tree if the ground is dry.

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LOOKING AFTER YOUR NEW TREES

To give your new trees the very best chance of survival you need to keep a weed free area around the base of each tree of about one metre - this is to prevent weeds competing with the tree, taking its water and nutrients. The best time to do this is before the end of May.

For apple trees, in the first few years, you should make sure you pick all the apples off your tree: the first few years' worth of apples will be bigger than normal so picking them off helps stop the young branches from breaking under their weight.

Look after your tree by watering it in summer.

HAND WEEDING AND MULCHING

Weeding around your trees will help them by reducing competition for moisture and nutrients with grass and weeds. Pulling out weeds around the trees by hand is an effective way to manage them- if you have the time! You'll then need to 'mulch' the trees to stop the weeds growing back. You can use one metre of horticultural black plastic cut into squares - use pegs or bent pieces of fencing wire to keep it in place. Alternatively you can use pieces of old carpet or wood chip as mulch- anything which will block out light to repress weeds. Place them around the bottom of the tree but make sure it isn't piled up against the stem of the tree. You can also use a chemical weedkiller around your trees like glyphosate.

MOWING OR STRIMMING

Mowing will not benefit the growth of the trees as it invigorates grass growth, creating extra competition for water. If you do have to mow between the trees, take care to avoid damaging them.

OPTIONAL - PRUNING

'Formative' pruning is the initial pruning of fruit trees, which is usually done for about the first four to five years of the tree's growth. This kind of pruning is about helping creating the form, or shape, of the tree that it will keep throughout its lifetime.

Pear and plum trees don't need to be pruned unless they become oversized (it you prune your plum trees, this should only be done between May and September because they are susceptible to silverleaf disease at other times of the year. It is a common disease, everywhere, and is usually fatal).

If you want to give your apple trees (or pear trees if you wish) the best start then you can follow the pruning guide below, although you don't have to; they will still grow into fruit-bearing trees if you don't prune. However if you're feeling brave, follow the steps below or get a green-fingered person to help out, it gets quite technical!

HOW TO PRUNE APPLE TREES

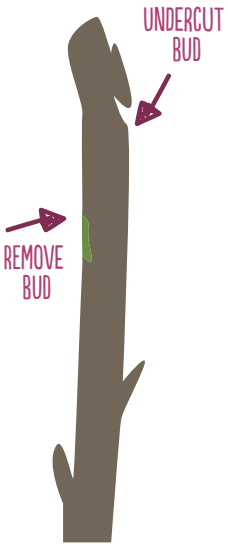
In a traditional orchard the aim is to create a branch structure that is open and regular (like in the image to the left)

A traditional open branched 'goblet-shaped' tree form

This helps the air circulate around the tree, lets the light in, makes the fruit easier to reach, and makes ongoing maintenance easier. It will also make the branches grow stronger so that they won't break under the weight of heavy fruit.

YEAR 1

To develop a branch structure it is necessary to decide at which height you want the side branches to develop from. A branching height of about one metre would be appropriate for your trees.



To do this, choose a point above a bud on the main stem just above one metre in height. There should be a good number of side buds lower down the stem from the point chosen.

Undercut the top bud carefully and remove the 2nd lower down.

The reason for this is that the actual branches that we want to grow on will come from the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th buds and so on, lower down the stem.

The leading bud ('apical bud') produces auxin, a plant hormone that suppresses the growth of the side buds (lateral buds) lower down the branch or stem. This is how the tree ensures that its growth is concentrating on growing 'up and out' – but we want the tree to grow branches lower down so that we can reach the fruit.

By undercutting the apical bud we are weakening, but not removing, its influence on the buds lower down.

Removing the 2nd bud stops it from becoming the new apical bud.

Cutting these top buds will make the buds lower down grow out into strong branches, and then next year when you prune again, the remaining stunted middle stem can be cut off again.

YEAR 2

During the growing season the cut maiden stem will send out side branches. We want to select the 'best' five or six branches. These branches will form the main structure of our tree into the future, so you'll want to keep the branches which are best placed to give the tree a good open structure. If we were to view an 'ideal' tree from above, the branches would be evenly spaced apart forming a regular 'star' pattern. We can then remove any unwanted branches back to the main stem.

To encourage the selected branches to bush out and develop side branches we can prune each of them in turn. There are a couple of principles to consider:

• The further back a branch is pruned, the slower its growth rate in the following year. Therefore we can 'speed up' or 'slow down' the branch growth to help even out the side branches.

so:
For a strongly growing branch, make the pruning cut within the last third of its length.

For a weakly growing branch, cut it back further but no more than by a half.

• We can also select the direction a branch will take by choosing which side bud to prune back to.

For example:
If we want the branch to grow up prune to a upward pointing bud, to grow to a particular side, select a bud on the desired side.

If a branch or tree is a very vigorous one, then it may be necessary to tie down the branch/branches to the position you want it to be in, and leave it tied for a whole growing season. Use soft twine and peg or stake it/them down to the ground. Avoid damaging the main stem by tying back to the tree itself.

YEAR 3 AND BEYOND

At this stage the main structure of the tree will have developed. Formative pruning continues in the same way as in ‘Year 2’, except you only need to prune the shoots which come off of the main framework branches.

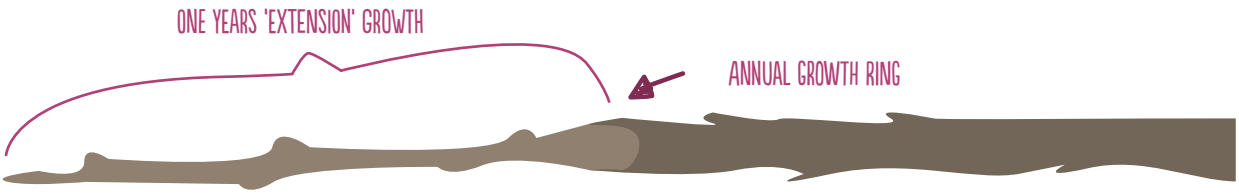
The only extra things to do now are:

- Remove branches that are crossing over others, growing back towards the centre of the tree, are damaged or diseased or are over crowding each other.

- Remove unwanted shoots from the trunk and vertical growing ‘watershoots’ from the branches.

It may be necessary to continue tying down main branches or side branches to encourage them to grow into their desired positions.

When pruning branches, rather than when removing them, try NOT to cut back into the previous year’s wood. Prune back only into the last years ‘extension growth’ as shown in the picture below:



SHOOTS FROM THE ROOTSTOCK

It is worth mentioning that should there ever be any shoots appear from below where the tree joins with it’s roots, these should be trimmed off as soon as possible if they appear. Shoots from the rootstock are uncommon, but if left they can take over the tree and they won’t produce any fruit.

NEED HELP?

If you have problems with your new trees, call the Woodland Trust for advice on 0845 293 5689, or email woodlandcreation@woodlandtrust.org.uk.