

Site Preparation For Fruit Tree Planting

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Before a fruit tree is planted, there must be adequate space. Most fruit trees require an area 25 feet by 25 feet; dwarfs need about 12 feet by 12 feet. The site must have full sun. And, a single peach tree can easily produce two bushels of fruit -- about one hundred pounds -- so don't plant too many fruit trees for your needs.

Fruit trees are best planted in January to allow time for root development prior to spring growth. During the previous fall, the site should have been prepared as follows: clear the site of perennial weeds, and till an area at least 4 feet by 4 feet well. Any hard pan (layer) beneath the soil should be broken up. Level the site, and till again.

Organic matter may be added to the planting area, but it is unnecessary, and never add fertilizer. To allow for soil water drainage, the site may be built up so that the tree will be sitting on a small berm. Seed the site in annual rye grass. At planting time in January, kill the rye grass berm area with glyphosate herbicide (the dead root channels from the rye grass allow for better water intake in the planting area).

Plant the tree in the middle of the killed sod area in a hole as big as the root system, usually about 12 inches square, and at least 18 inches deep. Plant the tree and refill the soil to the same depth that the tree grew in at the nursery, being careful the tree does not settle too deep.

In April or May, as the grass greens up, spray 3 or 4 feet around the base of the tree with glyphosate herbicide. It is critical that this be done if the tree is to perform well; if you do little else but maintain this weed-free circle around the tree, the tree will do better than if nothing at all is done.

The best tree to plant is the variety adapted to and recommended for your area; to avoid getting stuck with the luck of the draw at your local garden center at planting time, be sure to order fruit trees in September or October. Select mid-size trees; they are cheaper and grow better than the larger trees. And, it is far easier to cut 3- to 4-foot trees back to 18 to 24 inches, than to prune 5- to 6-foot trees. Such strong cutback is necessary to remove apical dominance, put the top in balance with a reduced root system, and force out strong vigorous shoots which are easy to train. The trees should have healthy white roots with no brown streaks. Also check for borer presence or damage.

With proper care, it is highly possible for your fruit tree to fruit the second year after planting.