

How to care for your fruit tree

Water

It takes about two years for the roots of your newly planted tree to become established and grow beyond the planting hole. Routine watering is critical during this time. Root growth is slow if soil around the root ball is too wet or too dry so, in the first two years, you want make sure the soil in the root zone is evenly moist.

After you plant your tree create a water basin. Dig a donut shaped ring an inch or two away from the trunk and wide enough that it encompasses the root ball and slightly beyond (the root zone). Each time you water, fill the donut ring to the top. This ensures water will seep into the soil around the root ball rather than flow elsewhere.



The frequency and amount of water you should give your tree depends on soil type, ground cover, weather and tree size. For example, a healthy first-year tree with no mulch requires 5 to 15 gallons of water per week in the summer months in hot areas of California. Mulch helps keep soil moist and healthy so always make sure the area around the tree is well mulched.

Check your new tree's soil a few times a week to make sure it is sufficiently moist. Always smart to periodically check your soil moisture at the depth of the root ball too. Using a shovel or garden trowel, dig down a little ways to the approximate depth of the tree roots to see if the soil is sufficiently moist.

As a trees canopy grows, so do its root and so does the area you need to water. In about two years, if your trees canopy shows healthy and substantial growth you will know the roots have extended beyond the root ball and are becoming established. At this point the tree will no longer require as much of your care and you can start letting nature take over.

Fertilizer

Be cautious with fertilizer as too much of it or applying it when it is not needed will be harmful to your trees health and your soils health. In most cases, proper mulching is all you need to ensure your tree has the nutrients needed for growth.

Although deciduous fruit trees require many nutrients for growth and fruit production, those grown in residential settings with typical soil rarely need to be fertilized. If other leafy green things (including grass) are growing in your soil and if you keep your tree well mulched, then it is likely your soil will be healthy enough to provide the nutrients needed for the tree.

Cases to apply fertilizer:

- If planting site is fallow, apply fertilizer at planting.
- If soil has a known nutrient deficiency
- If tree shows signs of nutrient deficiency - discoloration in leaves and slow or irregular growth

Choose a fruit tree specific fertilizer and follow the application instructions provided on package.

Mulch

ALWAYS MULCH.

Mulch is any brown material - chopped leaves, wood chips, yard waste, twigs, etc. - put on top of the soil to conserve moisture, suppress weeds, encourage beneficial organisms, reduce erosion, and much more. As it breaks down it improves soil fertility by improving its composition, encouraging beneficial organisms such as earthworms and reducing the number of weeds that compete with the tree for nutrients.

Pruning

Pruning fruit trees helps keep them healthy and is necessary for optimal fruit production and longevity of the tree. Pruning removes any dead, diseased or broken branches and branches that are blocking air and light flow in the canopy of the tree. Air and light are essential for photosynthesis and to keep tree dry so it can fight off disease and insects.

You also prune to train your trees structure into one that works for you and it.

Major pruning should be done in the winter months when the tree is dormant and most of its energy is stored in the trunk and roots. Major pruning cuts should be done at an angle so that moisture does not collect and allow for rot and disease to settle.

Here are some helpful links to information on the Web about fruit tree pruning:

“Training and Pruning Fruit Trees”, <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag29.html>

“Basic Fruit Tree Pruning Instructions”,
<http://www.lawn-and-gardening-tips.com/fruit-tree-pruning-instructions.html>