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**PLANTING A TREE OR SHRUB?**



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# PLANTING A TREE OR SHRUB?

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**THE few minutes spent in planting a tree or shrub properly can be the most important moments of its life.**

A little time can mean the difference between a vigorous and a weak root system, and a tree is only as good as its roots. Protection of the roots before planting is also important. Bare-rooted trees need more attention than those in a hessian-wrapped root ball or those growing in a container.

## When to plant

**Deciduous:** In the winter when dormant.

**Evergreen:** Late autumn while the soil is still warm enough to allow some root growth before the winter; or in spring before the weather is too hot.

**Frost tender:** Spring after the danger of frost is over.

**Container grown:** At any time of the year.

## Pre-planting care

Examine the roots to make sure they are free from pests and diseases and, if necessary, seek advice from specialists at the Department of Agriculture, South Perth. Keep the roots moist with a covering of moist soil or cover bare or balled roots with wet hessian and polythene. Do not disturb container grown plants, and keep all plants in a cool, shady position until ready for planting.

## Hole preparation

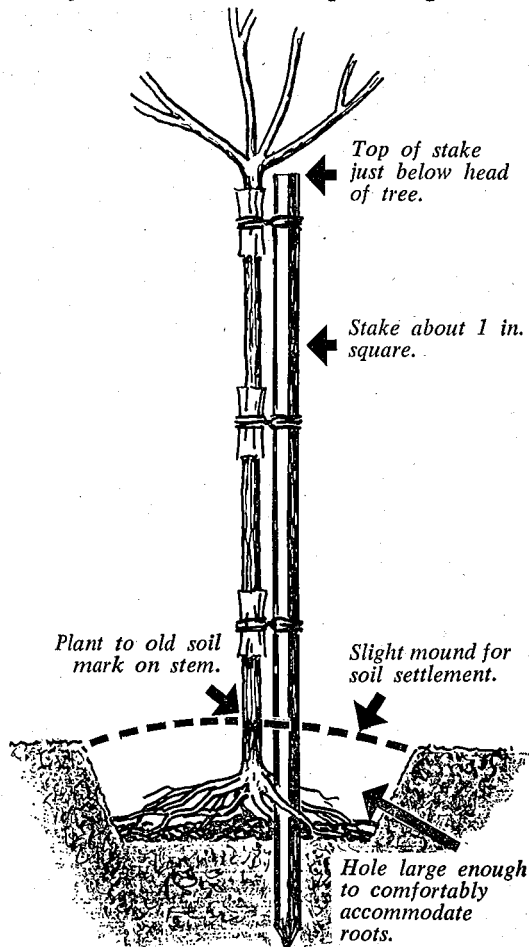
The hole should be wide and deep enough to allow the roots to be spread out. Avoid bringing up the subsoil as this is often infertile. Well decomposed organic matter such as peat, garden compost, animal or fowl manure should be mixed in the hole with one or two handfuls of blood and bone or superphosphate. A slight mound in the bottom of the hole allows excess water to drain away and the roots to be spread outwards.

## Planting

The soil in the root ball or container should be thoroughly moist before planting. The roots of deciduous trees may be plunged into water for six hours. Some trees produce long tap-roots and cutting these back to the general

root area will encourage a more fibrous root system as well as making planting easier. Damaged roots should be trimmed with a sharp knife or secateurs so that they heal quickly without rotting.

Gently separate the roots and spread them out evenly with as little damage as possible. If strong prevailing winds are a problem, help the anchorage by placing the tree with the strongest roots towards the prevailing wind.



**A correctly planted tree**

Always plant at the same depth as the old soil mark on the stem. If the tree is budded or grafted, the union should finally be just above the soil surface but plant it an inch or two higher to allow for settling. Place a straight stick across the hole to check that the planting depth is correct.

Trees with thin stems or a lot of foliage will require support. A stake can be placed behind the tree to be inconspicuous, or facing prevailing winds. The bottom half should be treated with a wood preservative. Thread the stake through the root system before the hole is filled and drive in firmly so that the top is just below the head of the tree.

Work the finer soil around the roots by gently lifting the stem up and down. When the hole is two-thirds full, the soil should be lightly firmed with the feet while the stem is held at the correct planting depth. The soil should be firmed again after the hole is filled.

At least 2 gallons of water should be given in a saucer-shaped depression around the tree. This will settle the soil around the roots, but care should be taken that there are no roots exposed after watering.

### Pruning

Pruning of ornamental trees is not usually necessary, but side branches of single-stemmed trees such as ash or elm can be cut back or thinned if required.

The top of citrus trees should be reduced until only those limbs essential for the framework remain. This helps to reduce moisture loss until the roots begin to grow.

Single-stemmed deciduous whips can be pruned above three or four healthy, outward-facing buds, 15 to 18 inches from the ground. Select the buds carefully as they will grow into the basic branches of the tree's framework.

If the young tree has strong lateral growth, retain two to four branches of equal size and vigour and prune these down to 6 to 8 inches, selecting buds in the position for desired future growth.

Finally, secure the tree to the stake with a proprietary tree tie or by using hessian or an old stocking tied in a figure-of-eight so that there is padding between the stake and the tree.

### Aftercare

It is too easy to plant a tree or shrub and forget it in the hope that it will fend for itself. If the leaves of an evergreen wither and remain on the tree, shade it with brushwood or branches and spray with water two or three times a day. If the leaves are shed, keep the soil moist until new growth appears.

A mulch of damp peat or well-rotted garden compost will help to keep the soil moist and cool during the dry months and prevent reflected heat from damaging tender growth.

One or two applications of a balanced garden fertiliser during the growing season will help root and foliage growth.

Hoe very gently to keep down weeds, as they can harbour pests and diseases as well as robbing the soil of its moisture and nutrients. Deep hoeing damages the fine surface roots and should not be done.

Wire netting may be needed if rabbits or grazing stock are present. Keep an eye open for pests and diseases and check that tree ties are not restricting growth.

The initial preparation and later care is well worth while when, after a couple of years, you have the satisfaction of admiring an attractive shrub or lounging in the shade of a tree or picking fruit knowing that you helped the plant on its way.

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*Further information on the care of ornamental and fruit trees can be obtained from the Floriculture and Fruit Sections of the Department of Agriculture, Jarrah Road, South Perth 6151.*

