

Small Fruit Trees Factsheet

Purchase

Research – disease & drought resistance, years to fruiting, early/late fruiting, availability, final height & width

Check zones – Ottawa is Can. Zone 5a, 5b

For small gardens, buy self-fertile dwarf or semi-dwarf varieties

Trees not grown on own roots may affect hardiness

Buy locally for better service, fewer shipping problems

Keep potted trees moist & in light shade until planting

Field-grown trees are often severely root-pruned and need extra watering for several weeks

Site location and preparation

Fruit trees need lots of sun – 6-8 hours per day

Dwarf fruit trees should be at least 4 metres apart and semi-dwarf trees 5-7 metres apart

Plant in un-amended native soil and add organic mulch (compost, well-rotted manure, or coarse woodchips) to provide a slow release of nutrients.

Don't plant where salt exposure is a problem

Planting

Soak roots before planting or heel in and keep moist if planting delayed (bare root planting)

Check root ball for root damage or root strangling

Trim off damaged roots with clean shears

Centre tree in planting hole – 2 people better than 1

Planting hole twice diameter of root ball, twice depth of root ball, then backfill with existing soil until plant graft union is 5-7 cm above soil level & root collar is visible at soil line

Support tree while backfilling, water as you go, tamp soil down around tree, and create shallow saucer

If planting a bare-root tree, you can stake it but only up to one year – stake just outside diameter of root ball – use flexible material so tree can sway

Water frequently – every day for two weeks and every week deeply for another six weeks

Watering

Provide one good soaking per week, and water more frequently during hot, dry spells

Water in morning at root level – trunk to drip line

Most tree root systems are within top 30 cm of soil

Pests and diseases

Keep trees healthy with regular watering, fertilizing, proper spacing, air circulation, and good fall cleanups

Identify problems correctly before applying solutions, and use insecticidal soap sprays as necessary – prevent problems with dormant oil/lime sulfur

First year care

Prune away dead, diseased or damaged parts and internal crossed branches

You may remove lower branches up to 45-60 cm for easier access and better air circulation

Remove stakes at end of first year or sooner

Deep weekly watering as roots reestablish

No fertilizer except compost & well-rotted manure

Mulch around base for winter protection, pull mulch away from base in spring

Protect trees from animal pests

Consider cover crops between trees, especially legumes such as beans and soybeans for nitrogen fixing

Encourage fruiting

Space branches so that they spiral around tree at about 15 cm intervals vertically

Reduce number of blossoms for larger fruit

Provide protection from birds and squirrels

Pruning

Do dormant pruning in early spring

Don't leave stubs, don't damage branch collar

Prune for better light exposure, remove water sprouts

Wide crotches and narrow crotches – wide is stronger

Tree paint for cuts is no longer recommended

Subsequent year care

Maintain an organic mulch (compost, well-rotted manure, or coarse woodchips) on the soil as this provides a slow release of nutrients

Continue pruning dead, diseased, damaged and crossed branches as needed

Reduce to six to eight scaffolds in 3rd or 4th year

Glossary

- **Scion:** part of fruit tree grafted onto the rootstock
- **Rootstock:** root and lower trunk of grafted tree
- **Scaffold:** branch that will bear fruit
- **Leader:** highest tip of the tree – usually vertical
- **Crotch:** angle at which branch is joined to trunk
- **Cambium:** green ring visible in cross cut of stem

Have a question? Contact us! Visit our Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton Facebook page or email us at mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca