

Planting and caring for deciduous trees.

Pre-planting preparation

Any perennial weeds such as kikuyu, couch, blackberry etc should be ideally dealt with in the summer before planting. For planting on farmland it is beneficial to rip the site in the autumn. A tractor with a rabbit ripper penetrating 50cm will break through the hardpan which commonly exists some 20cm down - especially if the site has had a history of grazing or cropping. This is best done once there is some moisture in the soil as this will aid it to fracture along natural cleavage lines. However if the soil gets too wet the ripper will merely cut a slit, smearing over and blocking off soil pores making it harder for roots to penetrate. Cultivation over the rip lines will further assist root penetration and reduce the weed burden if done after the first germination. Again this should be done before the soil gets too wet or the weeds become too big because cultivation may then damage soil structure and simply just transplant the weeds.

Digging the planting holes

If the site has been ripped and/or cultivated then the holes will only need to be sufficiently large enough to accommodate the root ball (generally 40 - 60cm cubed) and can be easily dug with a spade. It is better to dig the hole on the edge of the rip rather than directly over it as this avoids any air gaps that may have been caused by the ripping. Where there has been no prior loosening of the soil it is advisable to dig a larger hole to help the roots make a start. Post hole diggers are a risky tree planting tool in clay soils as they tend to glaze (polish) the sides of the hole restricting root penetration. They should only be used as a pilot for the hole then to be expanded by spade.

Pruning

All bare root trees benefit greatly from a hard prune at the time of planting to minimise transplant shock and increase growth. We are happy to help you with this before we dispatch the trees.

Please follow this link for further pruning information.....

Planting

Planting is best done in late winter once the trees have been fully dormant and are thinking about starting to move again. It is helpful to wet the roots before planting (Do not of course allow the bare roots to dry out at ANY stage.) The trees should be set in the ground no deeper than they were growing in the nursery (excluding Poplars and Willows which love a deep planting). The soil layers (e.g. top soil, sub-soil etc) should be returned back into the hole in their original order. It is important that the roots are in reasonably close contact with the soil with no large air pockets. Particularly large clods should be broken up and it may be helpful to shake the tree a little as you are backfilling.

It is hard to generalise and cover all soil types; the above should be done without completely pulverising the soil and destroying all of the structure. Firm the soil around the stem by treading around it with your feet.

It is important NOT to add manure, compost etc *into* the hole on heavy or clay soils as these can create localised water-logging as they absorb water creating anaerobic conditions which favour root destroying organisms. These materials can be very useful instead as a mulch on top of the soil (see later). If you have sandy soil you can improve it by mixing in organic matter, clay or rock dust to increase the water and nutrient holding ability, but it is important to be mindful that too rich a water retaining mixture can cause localised water-logging and rot roots even on well drained soils. Extra care needs to be taken with the use of fresh manure as it can burn the bare roots if it is not decomposed. If you are planning to water the tree by bucket or hose it is helpful to form a saucer with a ring of soil about a metre in diameter. This will hold the water until it soaks in rather than having it run off the top, making summertime watering easier and faster. Saucers are usually much more easily formed in winter, especially on heavier soils - but in wet locations you may have to leave a plug hole on the downhill side to block up later so that the bowl doesn't fill with winter rains.

Weeds

Weeds are a big enemy on young trees and an area of at least 1 metre diameter should be kept free of weed competition until the trees are well established. If herbicides are used it is important that none come into contact with the tree's stem.

Fertiliser

Generally the tree will not be able to make use of fertiliser until its roots start to become active so delaying until 2- 6 weeks after planting is recommended. The application of 30gms (a handful) of a general slow release fertiliser (Including trace elements with Nitrogen content of only 3-10% - too much nitrogen will inhibit root development) should be sprinkled over the surface and generally repeated every three months during the growing season. Liquid seaweed fertiliser is also helpful initially. It is also beneficial to add a layer of dry well rotted manure which also acts as a mulch.

Mulching

Mulching is very useful to avoid excessive water loss through evaporation whilst maintaining a moist active soil zone above the roots. The best mulch to use is old manure or organic compost that will continue to feed the tree as it breaks down. There are however some points to watch: applying mulch in the winter will insulate the soil from the warmth of the sun and delay soil activity and tree growth. Better to apply in late spring. Avoid the mulch/manure from making direct contact with the stem as this can cause it to rot. Pale colour mulches such as hay or straw will reflect sunlight which can create sunburn on the young stem. It can be used as a bottom layer. Sawdust, wood chips and other woody matter will create ongoing competition with the tree for nitrogen as they break down.

Watering

Water is the secret to rapid growth and will make a huge difference to the growth of your trees if applied for the first summer or two. It is best to start watering early – when paddocks start to dry off in the spring - so that the trees do not get any check on their growth. Don't wait till Christmas to give them a present – they may go into a sulk from which it may be difficult to escape. Watering is more important in the early part of the growing season than later. It is better to water deeply at weekly or fortnightly intervals than to spread that same amount over shallow daily irrigation. This forces the roots down towards the water table and means they will be more stable in high winds.

Trickle irrigation is ideal for growing trees. It may take a little time to set up but will save much time over the summer and makes it more likely that the trees will get the water they need. Yellowing and loss of leaves during the spring/summer growing season (getting “autumn colour” early) is an indicator of insufficient water.