

Planting Instructions for Potted Nursery Stock

THE BASICS...

- ◆ TAKE CARE NOT TO KNOCK SOIL OFF OF ROOTS WHEN REMOVING POT
- ◆ PRUNE OFF THE TOP 1/3 OF EACH TREE AFTER PLANTING
- ◆ WATER NEW PLANTS WEEKLY IN THE FIRST YEAR
- ◆ PROTECT EACH TREE WITH A PLASTIC GUARD BEFORE WINTER

...AND A LITTLE MORE DETAIL:

Plants in pots tend to dry out sooner than plants in the earth. If you intend to keep your plant in the pot awhile, be sure to water it regularly. Potted nursery stock is intended to be planted in the year it is purchased. Special care should be taken to protect plants in pots during the winter by sinking them in the ground, mulching them, or other means.

Care should be taken to plant nursery stock at the same height or a little deeper than it is in the pot. Deeper planting provides better anchorage, and is particularly a good idea with quince trees or pears grafted onto quince. However, be careful with all grafted trees that you do not bury the grafted portion, or it may take root and “bypass” any dwarfing effect of the rootstock.

Dig your planting hole extra deep to loosen the soil, but put enough soil back in the hole that the pot is at the desired height. Remember that the soil you have loosened will settle, and the plant may end up deeper than intended. Remove the pot and spread out any circling roots in the hole, leaving the dirt otherwise intact. Backfill and lightly tamp the hole. You may return the pot to the nursery for recycling.

Pruning off the top 1/3 of the tree may seem drastic, but it is very important. The roots will have less top growth to feed until they become established. Therefore, the tree will be less stressed during its recovery from transplanting. Unpruned trees will produce little to no growth in the first year and may lose leaves prematurely due to stress. Pruned trees will establish more quickly and put on growth.

Water is the single most important nutrient of all. Water new plants at planting time and at least weekly when there is less than an inch of rainfall per week. The first year is the most critical as the plant is establishing itself in its new environment.

Plastic spiral guards are very effective against mouse and rabbit damage. Push the guard down into the soil slightly. Fruit tree bark is gourmet fare, and spray-on repellents are not likely to deter your four-legged friends all winter. You may also consider tying your tree to a stake or constructing permanent support for dwarf trees. If you have several trees, making a map of your orchard is a good idea.

I am often asked what fertilizer should be used at planting time. In a reasonably healthy soil, fertilizing is not necessary, and concentrations of fertilizer (including manure and compost) in close proximity to the roots can burn them. Mulching the top of the soil is a practice which can be heartily recommended instead as it conserves moisture and slowly releases nutrients into the soil. If you do fertilize, use bonemeal or another high phosphorus product and thoroughly mix it into the hole before planting.

