

Fall Planting & Care for the Home Orchard



September and October are an excellent time to plant fruit trees as well as other flowering and shade trees. As the air cools off in autumn, the soil continues to stay warm. This helps to promote continued root growth even while the leaves start to color and drop. This gives a fall planted tree a head start over one planted the following spring because it has already started to establish a root system that will give it better access to water and nutrients in the spring.

Be sure to choose a healthy well established container grown tree. These trees have established



root systems and give you another head start over the planting of a bare root or freshly potted tree in the spring! Follow the planting directions provided with the tree when purchased. You can stake it in the fall or wait until the following year to do this.

Fertilizer should be used sparingly in the fall. You want to promote root growth but not new top growth in the fall. Use a slow release organic type product or one of the specialty transplant fertilizers that promote root growth and be sure to apply some additional fertilizer in the spring.

Water your new trees regularly through the fall. Unless we get 1" or more of rain at one time, do not rely on rainfall to keep your new plants watered well enough. Water thoroughly each week and gradually increase the days between waterings until the ground freezes. While pruning is expected on fruit trees, wait until spring to do this. You can do any pruning and your fertilizing in the same weekend early next spring.

Some fruit tree selections need another variety for pollinating while some varieties can produce fruit all by themselves. Look for guidance from your garden center professional on how to match the right trees to your needs. Remember, fruit trees need plenty of sun and well drained soil for success so choose your spot carefully and give them enough room to grow so they produce loads of wonderful fruit in the coming years.

*- Jeff Thompson
Pennsylvania Pride Grow Team*

