

Planting Bare-root Trees etc.

By Valerie Jean Rose

January 29, 2010



Don't wait until the weather's good – plant trees and perennials now.

Thousands people will plant thousands of trees in the spring, on Arbor Day. But why wait until the last Friday in April? Here in the Pacific Northwest, our maritime climate make mid-to late-winter an ideal time for adding trees and shrubs to your landscape. You may be thinking, “Are you kidding? It's raining so hard I'll have to swim out to the shed to get a spade. I'll have to wear more wool than your average sheep! My fingers will freeze in gardening gloves – my fingers would rather be wrapped around a hot mug while I sit inside, wrapped in a warm shawl, browsing through seed catalogues. Do I have to go outside now?”

No, you don't have to – but if you wait and plant new trees in the spring or summer, you'll have a lot more watering to do. Winter rains help newly planted roots settle into the soil. And February is a great time to find bargain-priced 'bare root' trees and shrubs. Our nurseries offer fruit trees, deciduous trees, small fruits, strawberries and roses with roots free of dirt, burlap or a container. If you plant fruit trees and berries, you'll develop an edible landscape that feeds you well into the future!

Bare root plants should be planted as soon as you bring them home. If you can't plant immediately, store plants in a cool area and bury roots in moist sawdust, sand, dirt or coco coir (peat moss substitute.) **DO NOT** store the plants with their roots in water overnight – they need to breathe, not drown. A couple of hours before planting, the roots will benefit from being re-hydrated. Submerge the roots in a bucket of water, and don't remove them until you are ready to plant. This will keep the roots from drying out while you prepare your plants' new home.

Location, location location!

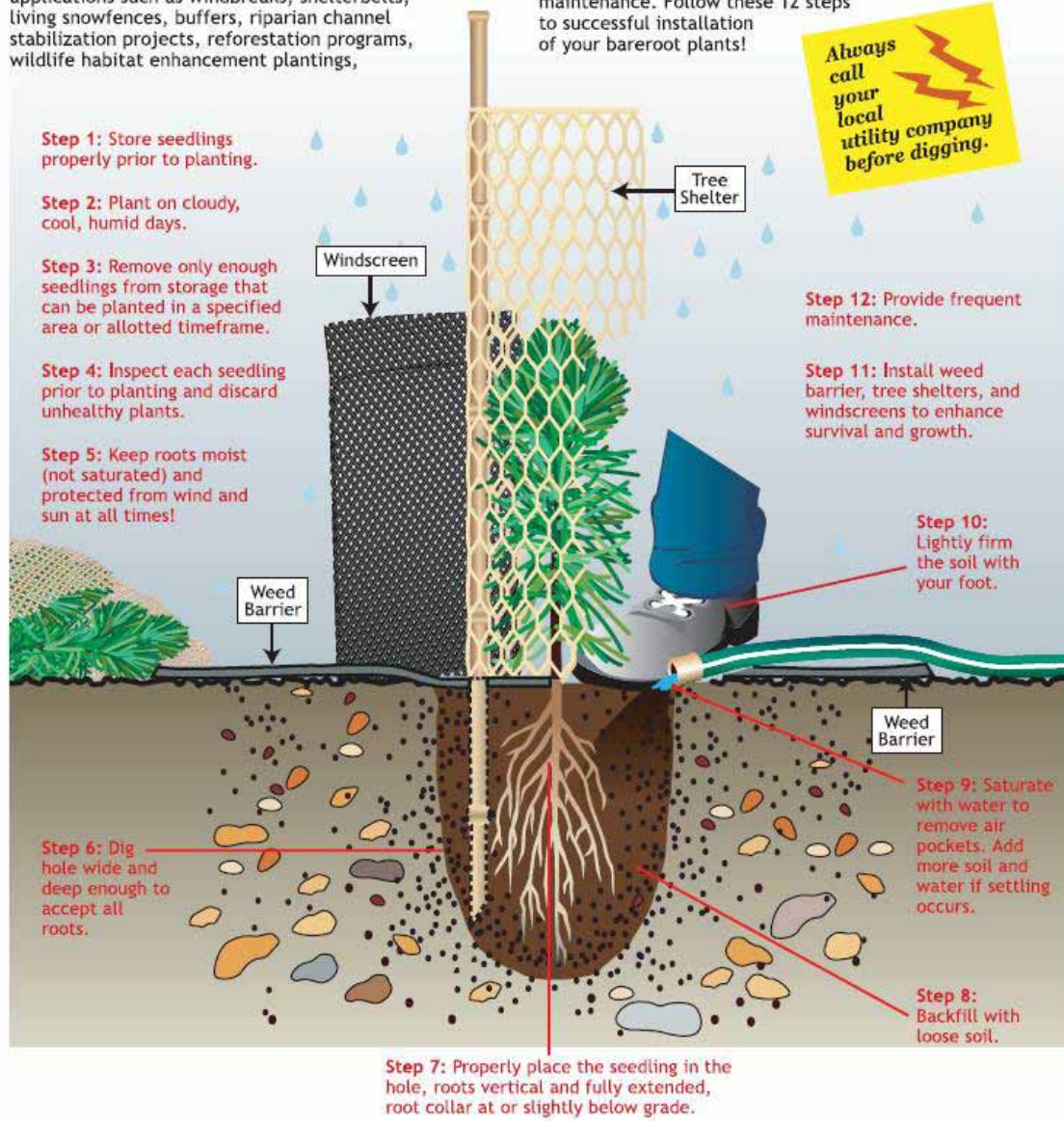
Where will you put these new plants? Given a few years' growth, a properly placed tree can provide shade from hot summer sun (which does happen – remember last summer?) Choose your location wisely, and **CALL BEFORE YOU DIG** to avoid cutting utility lines: 1-800-424-5555. **Look up** – are there wires or rooflines that will interfere with the plant's mature height? **Look down** – is there a patio, sidewalk or building foundation that will limit the room needed for growing roots? **How wide** will the plant be in a few years? Give your plant all the room it will need when it is full grown. If you're left with a lot of bare ground this season, apply mulch now, and plant annuals or a groundcover in the spring.

For trees, dig the hole at least two feet wider than the size of the root system or root ball. A large hole will allow better root growth, and is especially important in compacted soils. Use the edge of your spade to roughen the sides of the hole – this will help the new roots grow outward, instead of curving back around. The planting hole should be the same width top to bottom.

Planting depth is important! Carefully set the tree in the hole with the topmost roots at ground level or slightly higher (2") to allow for settling. If your soil contains lots of clay, add mulch to improve water and airflow around the roots. A good ratio is 1/3 mulch to 2/3 soil. Fill the hole with soil about one-half full, lightly tamping it with your foot to remove any air pockets. A lead foot will crush the tender roots, so step lightly. Water slowly to saturate the soil and remove any remaining air pockets, then finish filling the hole with the soil/mulch mixture.

Bareroot plants are one- to three-year-old nursery stock that are dug, stored, and shipped without soil or potting mix surrounding their roots. Bareroot plants are inexpensive, easy to plant, and offer field grown hardiness. They are an excellent choice for many hardwoods and some conifers used in conservation applications such as windbreaks, shelterbelts, living snowfences, buffers, riparian channel stabilization projects, reforestation programs, wildlife habitat enhancement plantings,

xeriscapes, and more. Proper planting of bareroot seedlings is *one* critical step in a successful conservation planting that includes a good design, proper site selection and preparation, appropriate species selection, quality nursery stock, suitable temporary storage and handling, correct planting, and frequent, long term maintenance. Follow these 12 steps to successful installation of your bareroot plants!



Always Mulch New Plantings

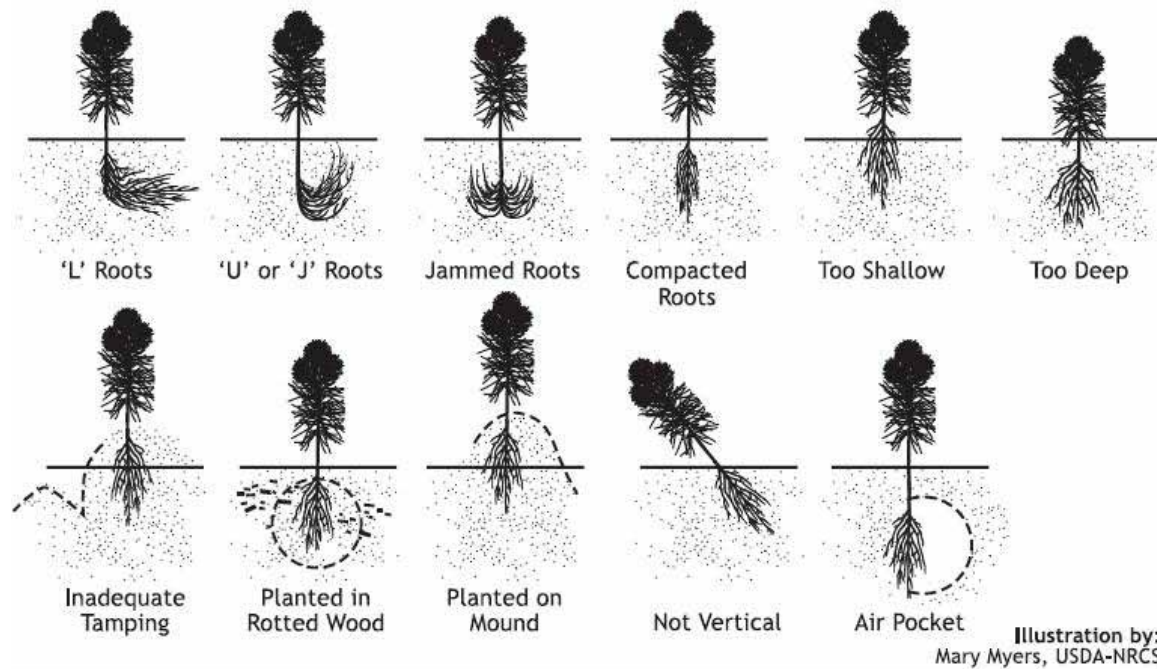
Add 3 – 6 inches of mulch around the base of the tree, but not piled against the tree trunk. Mulch will keep the soil moist, limits weed growth, and discourages injury from lawnmowers and weed-eaters.

You don't need to fertilize trees when you plant them. Newly planted trees do require routine, thorough watering. Winter rains will often take care of this, but be prepared to bring out the hose during any dry spell, especially during our annual August drought. Water the tree regularly for at least 3 years after planting.

Generally you don't need to stake trees. Young trees standing alone with tops free to move will develop stronger, more resilient trunks than tightly staked trees. However too much wind can bend young trees, causing stress and root damage. To properly stake a tree, drive in two wooden or metal posts next to the planting hole before you backfill. Secure the tree to the stakes with broad straps, used bicycle innertubes or pieces of worn-out hose; don't use wire because it will girdle (tear) the tree bark.

A small investment of money and time in this cold, rainy season will provide long-lasting rewards to you and your garden. Set down the seed catalogue, put on your gloves and boots, and go find some bare-root treasures to enhance your landscape into the future.

How NOT to Plant a Bare-root Seedling



How NOT to plant a bare-root seedling: Trees and shrubs won't thrive if they are planted like these. See the article or consult Web sites for correct and successful planting procedures. / **Illustration by:** Mary Myers, USDA-NRCS

How to choose an apple tree

Western Cascade Fruit Society, www.wcfs.org, lists these 10 apple cultivars as the best for growing in western Washington:

■ Williams Pride, Gravenstein, Jonamac, Chehalis, Karmijn de Sonnaville, Liberty, Gala, Elstar, Spartan, Jonagold

More information about fruit varieties and planting methods can be found in these references:

■ "Heirloom Apples for Western Washington," WSU Island County Extension Service, [http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/](http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/HeirloomApples.html)

[HeirloomApples.html](http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/HeirloomApples.html)

■ "Care of Bare-Root Plants," University of Nebraska-Lincoln, <http://extensionhorticulture.unl.edu/Articles/SJB/Bareroot.shtml>

■ "Planting Bare Root Trees," WSU Spokane County Extension, [www.spokane-county.wsu.edu/spokane/eastside/Fact Sheets/C108 Planting Bare Root Trees 05.pdf](http://www.spokane-county.wsu.edu/spokane/eastside/Fact%20Sheets/C108%20Planting%20Bare%20Root%20Trees%2005.pdf)

■ "Hand-Planting Guidelines for Bareroot Trees and Shrubs," Natural Resources Conservation Service, www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ecs/plants/pmpubs/bareroot.html

More information at:

- Western Cascade Fruit Society, www.wcfs.org
- 'Heirloom Apples for Western Washington,' WSU Island County Extension Service, http://clark.wsu.edu/volunteer/mg/gm_tips/HeirloomApples.html
- 'Care of Bare-Root Plants,' University of Nebraska-Lincoln, <http://extensionhorticulture.unl.edu/Articles/SJB/Bareroot.shtml>
- 'Planting Bare Root Trees,' WSU Spokane County Extension Service, <http://www.spokane-county.wsu.edu/spokane/eastside/Fact%20Sheets/C108%20Planting%20Bare%20Root%20Trees%2005.pdf>
- 'Hand-Planting Guidelines for Bareroot Trees and Shrubs,' Natural Resources Conservation Service www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ecs/plants/pmpubs/bareroot.html