

# HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR NEW FRUIT TREE

*This information is excerpted from "A Year in the Life of an Apple Tree" by Derry Walsh. This isn't the only way to get your tree to grow, but it might be useful for you.*

I do my grafts and bundle each variety together and store them in damp sawdust out of the sun, out of the wind, out of the rain, ideally at 7-9°C (in a room in the barn). I use the plastic milk cartons/crates 13" x 13" 10.5" high and put a black plastic bag inside the crate and inside the plastic bag I put my grafted trees upright in bundles packed with damp (not wet!) sawdust.

I tie the black plastic bag over the sawdust so the unions are covered, but the scions are not. This increases the humidity around the unions and also prevents the sawdust from drying out. I've read that some people cover their unions for this first month. There is often not enough depth in the milk crates for the sawdust to cover the unions, but if you found a deeper container, it would be a good idea to cover the unions. I don't want them in the dark or the leaves will open up white. I'm in south coastal B.C. and I try to finish my grafting by the end of March.

Before the end of April, I pot the newly grafted dwarf trees into one-gallon pots (larger rootstocks into 2 gallon pots) in a commercially-prepared bark mulch/sawdust/peat mixture (West Creek Farms in Fort Langley). My MM106 and MM111 and M26 go into 11 L (2.5 gallon) pots and produce a very nice root system. I use slow-release fertilizer. In 2009, I used 125 gms Osmocote 14-14-14 (3-4 months) for every 10 x one-gallon pots (12.5 gms/pot) and every 6 x 11L pots (20 gms/pot). 12.5 gms is 2.5 teaspoons per one gallon pot. Twenty grams is 4 teaspoons per 11L pot. This works out to 1.75 gm Nitrogen per one gallon pot and 2.9 gms per 11L pot. I think I'll cut back even more in 2010.

It has been my experience that the root growth is better in pots than in the ground - more fibrous and more roots. In the ground they seem to produce one or two thicker roots and almost no fibrous roots. For the last five years, we have had very hot dry summers, so I have put a lot of time into manually watering my nursery trees at least every two days and sometimes daily if it is very hot in July and August.

If I have a grafted tree that I want to plant in my orchard, I have been waiting until they are two-years old. Meadow mice (voles) love the roots of one-year old apple trees. If they happen to run a tunnel next to a young apple tree they will eat absolutely every root and leave only a pointed stick where the roots were. I have planted 1-year old trees in an open-bottomed cylinder of hardware cloth, about 10" in diameter and 10" in depth. The holes are 1 cm x 1 cm. This has been well worthwhile. The roots of the nursery trees have not been eaten by the meadow voles. Of course, the mesh may need to be removed as some point.

If the tree is on M9 or Bud 9 rootstock, it will need a stake for the life of the tree (3" x 8' wooden fence post with 2' in the ground, or studded tee-post, or regular tee-post). If on M26, Quince, SJA, M7, MM106, MM111, Antonovka it will need a stake for a couple of months only.

Put the stake in first. Dig hole only as deep as the pot and at least 2x width. Do not amend the soil. Form a mound of soil in the bottom of the hole. Holding the rootstock portion of the tree, take the tree out of the pot, shake off all soil and/or potting mix. Straighten out the roots so they form a circle radiating around the trunk. Cut off any broken roots and any roots which will not radiate properly.

Place tree on top of the mound so the roots radiate evenly around the mound and all point downwards. Keep graft union as far above soil as it was in the pot. Backfill the hole with the native soil. Stake should be on the windward side of the tree and about 4" away from the trunk at soil level. Tie tree to the stake using an old stocking or a strip of rubber forming the tie into a figure of 8 so the tree will not bang against the stake when it is windy. Step on the soil to press it against the roots. Mulch with organic matter or the leftover soil from the pot or compost or leaf mulch (to retain water). Water tree well to settle it.

If it is springtime and if the tree is a whip and you are going to grow it as a standard pyramid-shaped tree, cut it back to 30" if it is a weak variety, or to 31-33" if it is a vigorous variety. If all goes well, the branches will form in the 6-8" below the cut. If it is Fall, do not cut back now, wait until Spring. Cut back in late February or early March just before the sap starts to rise. If it is a two-year old tree with branches, remove all branches below 18". Cut back the other branches to form a pyramid with the lowest branches being cut back to 12". Always make your cuts in springtime. Water well for the first two years. Keep area weed-free.

Apple (Antonovka, Budagovski 9, EMLA 7, EMLA 26, EMLA 27, & MM 111), Plum/Apricot ( Marianna 2624, Pear ( OHxF 333 & Quince Province BA 29C), and Cherry (Krymsk 5).