

Planning & Planting an Orchard

Orchards can be wonderful places for people, wildlife and growing fresh local fruit. In some regions of the country orchards were once or still are an integral part of the landscape. Sadly in many counties they have declined or disappeared on a vast scale due to changes in agricultural practice and cheap imports. So by planting an orchard you can be a small part of redressing this decline.

Why not plant a new young orchard for the future and create a little fruitful landscape of your own.



The first consideration when planning your orchard is what do you want to get out of it and what do you want to grow in it?

The simple answer is grow what you like, be it apples, pears or plums, medlars, greengages or damsons, as you are far more likely to use what you choose.

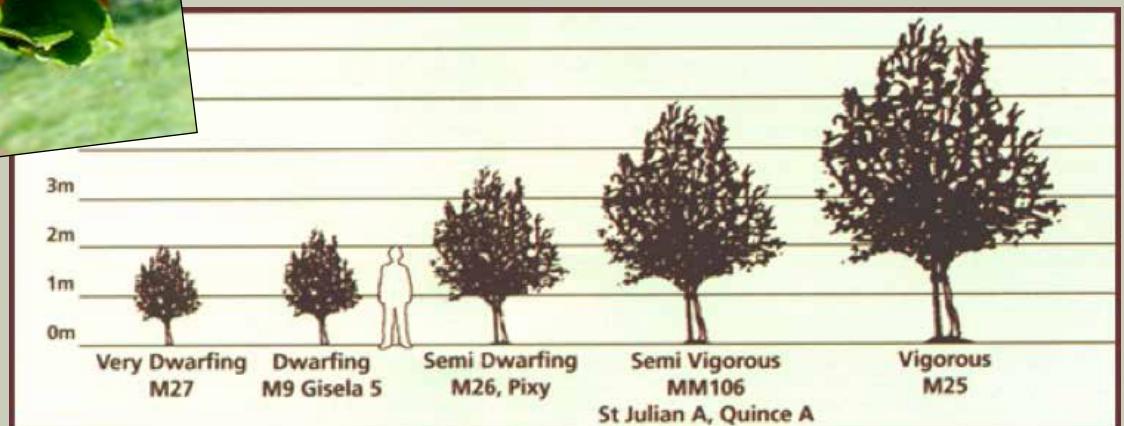
Within that choice, try and seek out varieties local to your area, the heritage fruit of a county or district will be well suited to local conditions like soil and climate and so should in theory thrive.

The size of the tree is vitally important: do you want a small tree that the fruit can be picked from the ground or a large standard tree that you can walk beneath or ultimately sit in the shade of?

This is where it pays to go to a specialist fruit tree nursery who will advise based on your requirements. The table below gives an indication of what size tree the different rootstocks will achieve.



So if you like red eating apples — grow a red eater.



Planting your Orchard

Having selected what you want to plant the next step is to give your trees the best possible start in life by planting them correctly and well. Whilst you have a choice of potted or bare root trees.

We recommend bare root trees planted in late Nov/Dec.

Dig a planting hole larger than the roots of the tree, breaking up the edges of the hole. Add a mycorrhizal root additive, as this gives the young tree a great start in life, especially on brown field sites or former arable land where the soil can be rather devoid of natural soil organisms.



Re-fill the hole with the tree in situ to the same level the tree was grown at in the nursery (usually a distinct line is visible) and press soil well down with a heel to firm the tree in. Finally, water in whatever the weather, this settles the tree and forces out air pockets.



For the first few years of the trees life it is vital to keep grass and weed growth away from the trees root zone where they would compete with the young tree.



For small numbers of trees a thick mulch is ideal. For larger plantings a herbicide application may be required. But

keeping the tree weed free cannot be over-stated, the growth rates will be hugely inhibited by grass growth around the base of the tree.

Aftercare

Planting your young fruit tree is just the beginning of your orchard journey, looking after those trees in their formative years is equally vital, protection from any threat be it rabbits, sheep, cattle or deer is essential so the right type of guard for the right situation is important, as well as keeping the tree weed free around the base for the first 3 to 5 years, by which time the trees roots will be deep down below the level of competition from the grasses roots.

SUMMARY

- Decide what you want to grow and what will get used.
- Source the trees you want on the appropriate Rootstock from a specialist nursery
- Preferably use bare rooted trees.
- Standard trees can be grown 7 to 10 metres apart bush or semi-dwarfing trees can be 3 to 5 metres apart.
- Dig a slightly over-sized hole
- Put in your tree and add mycorrhizal root powder
- Refill the hole making sure the tree is planted at the same depth it grew in the nursery.
- Protect your tree with a suitable guard from any possible threats.
- Water your tree well in and then mulch heavily preferably in early Spring.
- Check your trees progress regularly.

