



Linking Edible Arizona Forests

Growing Edible Arizona Forests, An Illustrated Guide

Excerpt from *leafnetworkaz.org*

Edible Tree Guide

PLANT Your Trees

- Place Your Trees in the Ground

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Although fruit trees may be planted throughout the year, the best time to plant trees is in winter, during the dormant season. In northern Arizona, or high in the mountains, wait until the soil has thawed or warmed slightly, before buds break into leaves.

February, March and early April are the best months. In desert areas of Arizona, January and February are good months to plant trees. This period is smaller because warm temperatures last longer in fall and arrive earlier in spring. Native desert trees can also be planted at the start of the monsoon season when humidity and soil moisture are high.

If you are planting edible trees purchased in pots from a nursery, be sure soil in the pots is moistened before planting your tree. Bare root trees require special care to prevent the roots from drying. Always check the condition of the roots and the packing material to make sure they are moist. If the roots of the tree are dry, soak the roots in water 12 to 24 hours before planting, and keep the tree in a cool place. If bare root trees are not going to be planted immediately, “heel” them into the ground by covering the roots with moist soil until they can be planted. If you are transplanting trees that were planted from seeds, keep some soil around the roots and prevent any exposed roots from drying.

Having determined where to place each tree, dig a planting hole twice as wide as the spread of the tree’s roots but only as deep as the root ball or bare roots. Widen the top few inches of the hole to create a shallow sunken basin around the hole, about 3 feet in diameter. This will facilitate water catchment and allow moisture to filter in slowly to the tree’s roots. In heavy clay soils, we recommend forming a donut-shaped basin to keep water from standing directly against the tree trunk for an extended period of time.

Amend the soil as needed, but do not add fertilizer to the planting hole—this can damage the young tree’s roots. Instead, work light organic mulch or compost into the soil around the tree. Once trees are established, add surface compost or pour liquid compost tea (water that has had compost soaked in it) over the tree root area.

Place the tree in the planting hole with the root ball resting on the bottom. The root flare of the tree—the area at the base of a tree’s trunk where a tree’s roots begin to grow underground—should be covered completely, but do not bury the trunk deeper than its root flare. If you are planting a grafted tree (most nursery varieties are grafted), place the *graft union*—the point where the two plants have grown together—2 to 4 inches above the soil surface. If the tree is bare root, spread the roots outward in the hole and enlarge the hole if needed so roots can extend straight in their natural direction.

Gently fill soil around the tree and carefully compress it to avoid air pockets around the roots. You can remove shoots on the first 18 inches of tree trunk above the ground. Water trees during or right after planting so soil settles firmly and fills in the air pockets around the roots. The final soil level should just cover the roots.



Community members plant a tree in the public right-of-way. The depth of the planting hole should equal the depth of the root ball, and the width of the planting hole should be about twice as wide as the root ball. Water the tree after planting to settle the soil around the root ball.