

## Fruit tree care

### Caring for your fruit trees during establishment

After planting, and in the first couple of years during establishment, you'll need to water your trees weekly from bud burst until September when growing ceases. Each tree should get 15-20l of water in one watering (this is more effective than more frequent watering with less water).



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To prevent competition from weeds and grass and conserve moisture, apply an 8cm (3ins) mulch of organic compost to the base of the tree in spring, but make sure it doesn't touch the stem (think of a doughnut shape). Your mulch ring should start off as a 1m wide circle and can be increased in diameter year after year for the first few years to pave the way for new feeder root growth.

Mulching is vital for the first few years and performs many important functions including grass and weed prevention, moisture conservation, temperature regulation of the root zone, soil building, and can attract important soil fungi for optimum tree health. An easy to source mulch is wood chip from hard wood tree species. This can be acquired for free from tree surgeons and creates long-lasting, humus-forming, mulch that creates a fungally rich soil - just what fruit trees want.

*Note: when asking for wood chip from tree surgeons make sure it's predominantly hard wood species and from trees free from any signs of honey fungus.*

For the first two years after planting, remove any tiny fruitlets that begin to form as soon as they begin to swell visibly and the blossom petals fall off. Although it is tempting to leave the fruit to grow straight away, your tree will establish better if it doesn't produce any fruit during this time (it takes a lot of energy to create fruit and this will be at the expense of new root and shoot growth). Also, fruit left to grow large on the young trees thin branches will snap them or leave them permanently deformed.

Keep an eye on the tree ties – loosen any which begin to get too tight as they can easily strangle the trunk.

The trees should be guarded once planted and the size and style of guard will depend on the main fruit tree pests in your area; they may be a small wrap-around plastic rabbit guard, or a 6ft, heavy-gauge wire guard if you're in the city and protecting from humans and their dogs!

Maintain tree guards and rabbit-proofing if necessary over the years and look out for any rubbing branches.



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### Caring for established trees

- ✓ Continue to keep the base of the tree weed-free. Continue to top up mulch and water during dry periods. Thin overcrowded fruitlets by hand in late June to leave one to two fruits per cluster. This will help achieve a good fruit size and prevent branches from breaking under the weight of fruit in autumn.
- ✓ Continue to check ties and fastenings regularly – loosen if required. Inspect trees regularly for signs of pests and diseases (see factsheet 'Pests and diseases' for further detail).
- ✓ Prune during the winter or summer as required (see factsheet 'Training and pruning' for further detail).
- ✓ Apply an organic mulch, or organic multi-purpose fertiliser to the base of the trees annually in spring (March) to give the trees a boost. Plant Bocking 14 comfrey near your trees for a continuous, on-site source of feed - its leaves can be 'chopped and dropped' onto the mulch throughout the summer to provide quick release potassium, nitrogen and phosphorus to the trees.

