

# Oxford City Farm Community Orchard

## Tips Sheet

Below are some tips on choosing, planting and caring for a new fruit tree – this is intended to give you some initial pointers and issues to consider. At the end is a list of more detailed sources of information.

### Choosing the Right Tree

**Type and Variety** – choose what you like to eat – apples, pears, plums, greengages, cherries. If you are thinking of planting an apple tree, a good tip is to go to one of the local apple days (Waterperry Gardens, Wolvercote Community Orchard, Warnham Meadow Community Orchard) to try different varieties. You may also want to choose a local or heritage variety.

**Size of Tree** – is determined by the rootstock and variety. See [www.orangeippintrees.co.uk](http://www.orangeippintrees.co.uk) for a great explanation of the different rootstocks or contact Andy Howard [www.heritagefruittrees.co.uk](http://www.heritagefruittrees.co.uk) for a fact sheet. A brief explanation is given at the end – the main issues to consider are: the size of your space, the effect you are trying to create, whether you could train against a wall or fence (espalier, cordon, fan) how you are going to pick the fruit if it is a large tree etc.

**Age of Tree** – the received wisdom seems to be<sup>1</sup> that it is best to plant a young one year old ‘maiden’ as it will establish more quickly. However, it will need formative pruning for the first three years (which the Orchard project can provide help with) - see pruning below. Container grown trees are quicker to fruit as long as they get off to a good start.

**Pollination** – some trees are self-pollinating others need at least two other pollinating trees close by – your tree nursery can tell you which group the tree belongs to (it depends on when the tree flowers and compatibility). Part of the reason for developing the Community Orchard map on the website is so you can see your neighbours so hopefully reducing the need to plant pollinators.

**Where to buy your tree** – there are a number of good local and internet suppliers including the Heritage Fruit Tree Co, Walcot Organic, Waterperry, Nicholson's Nurseries and Agroforestry Research Trust – the City Farm will also have its own grafted trees available next year.

### Planting

**Right Time to Plant** – containerised trees (more expensive- £25-50+) can be planted at any time of year but if you want to plant a ‘bare root’ tree (cheaper - £15-20) it is best to do this in early Winter as the roots of trees planted into warm soil early in winter will continue to grow and will therefore be more resilient to dry Spring/Summer in the following season. Although they can also be planted in Spring this can be more problematic if we have a very dry Spring/Summer.

**Where to Plant** – fruit trees can be planted in a relatively small space especially if trained against a fence or wall or even in a container. The main issue is the depth and quality of the soil – if it is very compacted or poor soil (e.g. heavy clay) it is worth digging over the site and adding organic material (e.g. compost, well rotted manure).

## How to Plant

- soak root ball/container for a couple of hours prior to planting,
- dig hole same depth as root ball and two times the width (want to encourage roots to grow out sideways and not down) i.e. fairly shallow but big enough so don't squash roots
- improve the material that has been removed from the hole by adding a bit of organic material (e.g. garden compost)
- water the hole (you can also add mycorrhizal fungi which can aid nutrient uptake by tree)
- put in stake (see below)
- putting cane across hole can help to ensure tree planted at right height (same level as in pot or ground and **below the grafting scar**)
- back fill hole and consolidate with foot
- tie to stake with a soft tree tie – see below
- water
- mulch (see below)

**Mulching** – it is **really important** that the tree does not have any competition from grass, weeds or other plants so it is essential to mulch an area of about 1 metre (if possible) around the tree – you can use compost, grass mowings, manure, chipped bark etc – to depth 10cm ensuring that it does not touch the tree trunk. The additional advantage is that it will help to retain moisture.

**Staking** – it is advisable with all trees to stake at least for the first couple of years (more dwarfing rootstocks need a life-long stake) – you want the stake to be about one third of the way up the trunk (the tree will become stronger if there is some movement higher up). The stake should be put in the hole slightly off centre, at 45° angle, on the windward side so tree blows away from the stake.

## Pruning

Initial pruning happens when the tree is planted - the main objective at the early stage is to create a good branch system and an open shape to allow plenty of air flow and light to penetrate the tree to help prevent disease and allow ripening. It can be a bit daunting to prune a newly bought tree but help will be on hand and we hope to run workshops each year. Borrow a good pruning book from the library or go the Royal Horticultural Society website.

If planting a one year old 'maiden' (no branches) or 'feathered maiden' (with branches) the aim of the first pruning is to cut the leader (main stem) at the height you want the trunk. This will ensure the tree puts all its energy into growing side branches.

The second year you want to retain 4-5 good branches (removing weak) and prune each one to about half to two thirds of the way down branch to an outside facing bud (next year's branch).

In the third year cut back branches by a third to encourage more branching.

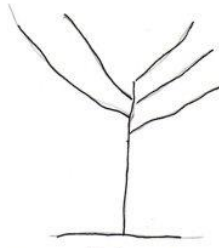
With ongoing pruning it is important to remember to prune apples and pears in Winter, plums and greengages, trained apples and pears in Summer.

I found this diagram helpful:

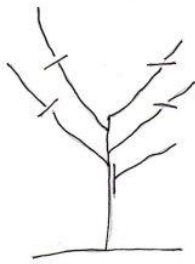
## How to Prune your new fruit tree.



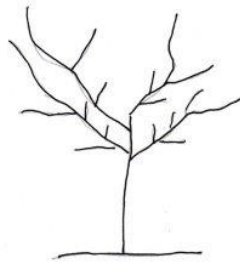
Maiden tree showing where to cut leader.



2 year old tree, showing growth made after initial pruning.



Pruning cuts to be made on 2 year old tree



Three year old tree, showing a well balanced tree beginning to take shape.

From <http://appletrees.org.uk/advice-and-consultancy/pruning-help/>

## Ongoing Care

**Watering** – this is particularly important in the first year – especially for trees planted in late Winter/early Spring. Mulch to prevent drying out (but only after rain). You may also want to consider feeding your tree in the first few years – seaweed, comfrey etc.

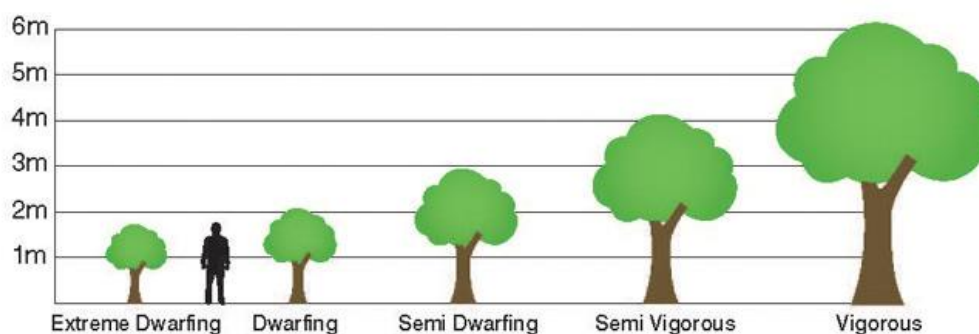
**Fruiting** – it is best to remove any fruit in the first couple of years so the tree puts energy into growing – difficult to do!

**Stake** – make sure the tree is not rubbing against the stake and the band isn't too tight.

**Pests and Diseases** – there are a variety of pests and diseases that can affect your fruit trees – the best prevention is to ensure that they are not stressed by ensuring they are watered, well staked and fed. The RHS website is a really good source of further information including preventative measures such as grease bands etc.

## Summary of Rootstocks

The best explanation I have found of the different rootstocks can be found under articles at [www.orangeppintrees.co.uk/](http://www.orangeppintrees.co.uk/). Or contact Andy Howard from [www.heritagefruittrees.co.uk](http://www.heritagefruittrees.co.uk) for a factsheet.



Fruit Rootstock	Rootstock name	Rootstock type	Ultimate Height
<b>Apple</b>	M27 (Similar to: P9)	Extreme dwarf	1.2m (48")
	M9 (Similar to: Pajam 2, Pajam 9, P2)	Dwarfing	1.8-2.4m (6-8ft)
	M26	Dwarfing	2.4-3m (8-10ft)
	M6	Semi Dwarfing	3m (10ft)
	M106	Semi Dwarfing	3-4m (10-13ft)
<b>Cherry</b>	Gisella 5	Semi Dwarfing	2.4-3m (8-10ft)
	Gisella 6	Semi Vigorous	3-4m (10-13ft)
	Colt	Semi Vigorous	5m (16ft)
<b>Peach, Plum, Apricot and Nectarine</b>	St. Julien	Semi Vigorous	4.5 (14ft)
	VVA1	Semi Dwarfing	2.5m (8ft)
	Torrinel 24	Semi Dwarfing	2.4-3m (6-10ft)
	Myrobalan	Semi Vigorous	5m (16ft)
	Ferlenain	Semi Dwarfing	3m (10ft)
<b>Pear</b>	Mont Clare	Semi Dwarfing	3m (10ft)
	Quince A	Semi vigorous	3-4m (10-13ft)
	Quince C	Semi Dwarfing	2.4-3m (8-10ft)
	Quince Adams	Semi Dwarfing	2.4-3m (8-10ft)

## Other Sources of Information

*Community Orchards Handbook*, Common Ground, Greenbooks, revised edition 2011 (we have a copy if you would like to borrow it)<sup>1</sup>

*A Handbook for Horticultural Students*, Peter Dawson, 2006

*For the love of an orchard: everybody's guide to growing & cooking orchard fruit*, Jane McMorland Hunter & Chris Kelly, Pavilion, 2010 (this is a lovely book for anyone wanting to find inspiration for planting a tree)

Royal Horticultural Society Website – <http://www.rhs.org.uk/> they have pages on all the different fruit

The free pdf catalogue from The Heritage Fruit tree Co [www.heritagefruittrees.co.uk](http://www.heritagefruittrees.co.uk)

Walcot Organic Nursery <http://walcotnursery.co.uk/> has really useful advice pages

Oxford Library has a variety of books to help with pruning and training.