

Choosing your tree

The most commonly planted fruit trees are apple trees but you don't always have to follow convention. Pear, plum, fig and medlar trees can also produce good results. Different varieties produce their fruit at different times of year. The fruit of early ripening trees tends not to keep well whereas later ripening varieties are suitable for storing over winter.

A key factor in getting a successful crop is the tree's rootstock. To ensure a productive tree, nurseries attach part of one tree to another recommended for growing fruit. This is called grafting, allowing you to benefit from the healthy rootstock of one tree and the tasty fruit of another. Rootstocks come in various sizes.

You also need to be aware of the potential size your tree will grow to and whether it's self-fertilising. Self-fertile trees will produce fruit without the need for another tree to pollinate it. If your tree is not self-fertile it will need to be paired with another one.

What to buy

Trees can be bought either in a container or bare-rooted. In both cases look for well-developed fibrous roots. For container grown trees, check that roots aren't congested and choose younger trees (1-3 years) which tend to establish quicker. Avoid plants that show any sign of disease.

Position

Place your tree in a sunny and sheltered position. This will maximise the time your fruit has to ripen.

Planting

Soak the roots before planting. Avoid planting if there's a frost - place roots into moist soil until conditions improve.

Container-grown trees can be planted at any time of year except when frosty or if the soil is too dry or too wet. Dig a hole a third wider than the roots and to the same depth as the tree's roots, firming the bottom of the hole into a slight mound. Insert the stake and your tree.

Fill in with soil and mound towards the base of the tree attaching it to the stake.

If you're growing your tree in a container, half fill a large tub with soil-based potting compost and place your tree on top. Fill the tub with more soil to the base of the tree, water well and feed regularly.

Fruit trees for a small space

A great way to make use of limited space is to train the tree along a south-facing wall or fence. Using a wall or fence allows for a longer ripening time as the wall will soak up the heat.

Make sure the structure is strong enough to support the tree in crop.

Aftercare

To protect your fruit tree from moths that will destroy the fruit and leaves, apply a grease band 45cm (18in) above soil level to the stake and trunk of your tree.

This is a sticky paper or glue that will stop wingless female moths being able to reach the branches of the tree to mate, of which its caterpillars will eat the leaves and fruit.

Grease bands should be applied late October and reapplied as necessary.

Additionally, apply a plant oil-based winter wash in December or January to kill off any overwintering pests.

Five to try

Malus domestica 'Queen Cox' - self-fertile, juicy red-yellow apples from mid October

[Pyrus communis 'Conference'](#) - partially self-fertile pear, green-yellow sweet fruit from October to November

Prunus domestica 'The Czar' - self-fertile dark purple dessert plum, resistant to frost

[Ficus carica 'Brown Turkey'](#) - self-fertile fig ideal for training along a wall. Rich fruit from August to September

Mespilus germanica 'Royal Medlar' - self-fertile dessert fruit from November