

The Bare Bones About Bare Root

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Bare root fruit and nut trees do very well in this region. Apples, guavas, oranges, blackberries and pecans thrive in the desert and bring diversity to your garden.

To produce fruit, deciduous fruits and nuts have minimum low-temperature requirements. When it gets down to 45 degrees or below for 60 minutes, you've got yourself a "chill hour." Different types of trees have different chill-hour requirements. Choose varieties with low minimums, usually 250 chill hours or less. Maricopa County usually has 300 to 400 chill hours per year.

To develop strong trees with healthy fruit, I'm going to let you in on a couple of secrets (although these secrets don't apply to citrus). First, the earlier in the season you plant, the better chance your tree has for success. Second, different areas of your yard have different temperatures. Some are cooler, while some are warmer.

Cold air is heavy and lingers in low spots. Fruit and nut trees like the coolest part of the yard. Seek the lowest part of the yard, with eastern or northeastern exposure. Better yet, dig out and lower a portion of the yard, near a solid block wall, which is ideal for collecting cold air. This also helps channel water and rain to the trees for irrigation purposes.

Buy and plant bare roots as soon as possible, up until early February. The sooner they are in, the better they grow. However, you can install container-grown plants until mid-March. It's usually too hot after that.

If any of your fences have drainage holes, sometimes called "wagon wheels" for their shape at the bottom of block fences, close them off when it's not raining with a board or even newspaper.

Some trees will do better in higher elevations, because of their chill-hour requirements. Within the Salt River Valley, elevations range from about 1,100 feet in Phoenix to 1,800 feet near Apache Junction, while parts of Cave Creek and Carefree are up to 2,500 feet.

In general, planting rules include digging a hole no deeper than the root system and no wider than five to six times the width of the roots. Fill the planting hole with several inches of water the day before and make sure all the water drains entirely away. Back-fill the hole with native soil and build a berm around the tree to hold water in. There are some variations and additional information for each type of tree and you can find that in my book, "Extreme Gardening," which also makes a great holiday gift.

Most of the fruit and nut trees are deciduous. They drop their leaves in the fall and go dormant in winter. They should be planted on the eastern side of the yard to provide cooling shade in the summer and let the sun through in the winter. If you plant well and care for trees organically, they can live from 10 to 15 years.