



General Planting Considerations

SITE

Fruit can be successfully grown out in the open in most parts of the United Kingdom. The site should be sunny, sheltered and ideally, though not essentially, in full sun. Some fruits will tolerate partial shade and this is mentioned in the text. On exposed sites, however, and at high altitudes, cropping will be poorer unless some kind of protection is provided. With increasing altitudes, above 600ft, winds become stronger and the growing season is shorter; nonetheless with proper shelter, soft fruits as well as dwarf trees of the early maturing tree fruits can be planted because they are quicker to mature and being smaller are more easily protected. Culinary varieties of tree fruits can also be grown in such situations.

SOIL

Fruit plants will tolerate a wide range of soils providing they are well drained and preferably at least 45cm (18in) deep for tree, bush and cane fruits and not less than 30cm (12in) deep for strawberries. A deep, well drained, medium loam of about pH 6.7 (slightly acid) is best for most fruits. Blueberries and related plants however, require very acid conditions. Sandy, gravelly and shallow soils over chalk, all of which tend to dry out quickly, are unsatisfactory but they can be improved by various means such as increasing the depth of shallow soil, the incorporation of bulky organics to increase moisture retention, or regular mulching and irrigation when necessary. Water-logged land must be drained before planting.

SHELTER

The provision of shelter will improve yields by approximately 15% in gardens slightly exposed to wind and by as much as 50% in very exposed gardens. Shelter can take the form of living barriers e.g. trees and hedges or non-living e.g. walls or fences. Generally a semi-permeable windbreak is best, e.g. a hedge, windbreak of trees or slatted fence, all of which reduce the wind speed. Solid barriers e.g. walls, fences or dense hedges can create turbulence and trap cold air to form a frost pocket. Living windbreaks do compete with the other plants so in a small garden walls or fences are probably best; they can also be used for growing trained fruit up against them. Ideally, shelter should be provided before the fruit is planted.

ROTATION

Ideally when fruit stocks have to be replaced, for various reasons it is better to replant on a fresh site. If this is not possible then soil from the planting row or hole should be exchanged with fresh soil from another part of the garden or a mixture of soil with compost or peat brought in from outside. This is particularly important in the case of strawberries, which should not be grown on land that has previously grown potatoes. There is no disinfectant or fumigant on the market for gardeners to purchase legally which will give effective sterilization of the soil.

POLLINATION

Most tree fruits are not self-fertile and, therefore, consideration must be given to the question as to whether it will be necessary to have one or more other varieties of the same fruit growing close at hand in order to achieve adequate pollination of the flower parts, without which there can be little or no fruit set. Bees as well as other insects and the wind itself, play an important part in transferring pollen from one flower to another ([Click here for further information on pollination](#)).

TIME OF PLANTING

Planting of cane, bush and tree fruits (not strawberries) other than those growing in pots, which can be planted at any time, should only be undertaken during the period when they are dormant. Usually this would be between November and early April provided the soil is in a suitable condition. When plants have started into spring growth before planting, they do not grow as well during their first growing season as they would have done had they been planted earlier.

WEED CONTROL BEFORE PLANTING

Sometimes fruit trees and bushes have to be planted in either a new garden or a neglected one. Both of these are likely to be seriously infested with weeds, particularly perennial ones which must be got rid of before planting. If the infestation is not too bad it is possible to pick out every root whilst digging. Alternatively the plot can be fallowed for one year, removing weeds as they appear throughout the summer or it can be treated with a suitable herbicide in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

The application of bulky organic surface mulches such as farmyard manure, peat, straw, coconut fibre, coco shells, compost — or alternatively black polythene — besides suppressing weeds, will greatly assist in the retention of soil moisture to the benefit of the crop. With the exception of black polythene these materials will also help in maintaining the soil structure and fertility.

Mulches up to 10cm (4in) thick are best applied during the winter months and should cover at least 1m (1yd) around individual plants or 45cm (18in) both sides of a row of plants. Mulching should continue for the first three to four years on good soils and every year on poor, sandy soils and for wall-trained trees which otherwise tend to dry out more quickly.

ROOT FORMATION AIDS

We strongly recommend the use of rootgrow™ when planting to encourage strong root growth and aid establishment. The one off treatment is 100% natural and is the only planting aid which is fully endorsed by the R.H.S, comprising of mycorrhizal fungi, which shortly after application begin to colonise the plant or tree roots, dramatically increasing the root area of your plants. [Click for here for more information on rootgrow™.](#)

FERTILIZERS

As a general rule it would be more convenient to apply one of the all purpose proprietary compound fertilizers such as Ken Muir Fruit Tree Feed, Growmore, Vitax Q4 or Osmocote', all of which contain fixed amounts of nitrogen, phosphoric acid and potash, according to the brand. A cheaper alternative would be to use straight fertilizers such as sulphate of ammonia, superphosphate and sulphate of potash, where the ratios between the plant foods can be varied to best suit the requirements of the crop and soil conditions. The important point to remember is only

to apply the fertilizer at the rate advised by the manufacturer. This means accurately weighing out the fertilizer and measuring the area of land over which it is to be applied beforehand.

On newly planted bushes and trees, fertilizers should be applied in mid-March as the buds begin to burst, or if planted later than this, immediately after planting. The fertilizer should be applied in a circle 45cm (18in) diameter around each bush or tree. Bushes planted over one year ago should receive applications of fertilizer each year in February or early March and broadcast 90cm (36in) both sides of the rows of bushes or in a circle 90cm (36in) diameter around individual bushes.

FROST PROTECTION

It is important to protect early flowering fruits against spring frosts if a worthwhile crop is to be obtained. The yield of strawberries can be seriously reduced by spring radiation frosts that can occur during the month of May when strawberries are in flower. Frost damage can be prevented by covering the plants with fleece, straw, sheets of polythene or hessian on frosty nights. Meteorologists forecast very accurately when damaging frosts are likely to occur and therefore when these precautions should be taken. Some frost protection during the flowering period can be provided by putting a top net over a fruit cage. [View our growing protection range.](#)

Wall fruit can be protected by rolling down a cover of fleece, hessian or thick netting at night when frost is likely and rolling it up during the day. This should be supported away from the plants by bamboo canes. Alternatively a clear polythene cover as recommended for peaches and nectarines to control peach leaf curl can be used and left on during the day but this restricts access for pollinating insects, so hand pollination may be necessary. This cover should be open at the ends and have a gap of 30cm (1ft) at the bottom to provide ventilation.

Bush fruits and small free-standing trees can be protected against frost by making a temporary framework of bamboo canes and draping this with a cover of fleece, hessian or thick netting.

[Click here to view our growing protection range.](#)

BIRD PROTECTION

To achieve maximum yields, ripening fruit should be protected against birds. This is particularly important for soft fruit and vines. A 'walk-in' fruit cage is the best solution as this can also prevent finches from pecking out the fruit buds in winter. Fruit grown against walls or fences can easily be protected by hanging a net down in front of the plants, secured to the top of the fence with staples and pegged to the ground, held away from the plants by long canes. [Click here to view our range of netting.](#)