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# ASK A MASTER GARDENER

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## BARE ROOT FRUIT & NUT TREES

*By Gay Wilhelm and Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardeners*

**Q** In 2009 I vowed to eat better and save money by growing my own fruit and nut trees. When is the best time to buy these trees? Any helpful hints to pass along?

**A** Bare root fruit and nut trees should be appearing in local nurseries in January. Bare-root plants typically cost 10 to 40 percent less than comparable container-grown plants, although we've saved as much as 70 percent in a few cases. Unsurpassed selection is another good reason to buy bare-root. Since the plants take up less space than those in containers, nurseries that specialize in bare-root plants often have extensive seasonal inventories. And if you can't find what you're looking for, you can always order it.

Bare-root plants often establish themselves more quickly than container plants for several reasons. First, roots in a container can be potbound. Second, though less common, roots in a container can be under-developed. Last, bare roots don't get "spoiled" by container soil, so bare-root plants don't have to adapt to any differences between container soil and your garden's.

Shop early because a plant's dormant period does not last long. Don't be enticed by deep discounts on bare-root plants in early spring; if plants start to leaf out, they won't do as well as dormant ones purchased during the peak of bare-root season.

To ensure that a particular variety is right for your needs and climate, check the hours of chilling required for fruit production, the season of fruit maturity, whether or not a tree needs a mate nearby for cross pollination, and its ultimate size. Also consider how much fertilizing and watering you are willing to do. And your planting site has to be adequate in terms of light and soil fertility/drainage. (Remember that fruit trees need full sun; even small amounts of shade will reduce bud formation. Call the Master Gardener hotline for info on improving the soil.)

Important hint: It is VERY, VERY IMPORTANT not to plant the trees too deep. Planting trees at an incorrect depth can be a serious mistake that can ruin your tree. Remember that rain and irrigation water will settle the tree down 2-5 inches after planting, depending on the type of native soil and how loosely you planted the tree. It is quite acceptable to plant the tree on a small mound.

We highly recommend the small book, "A Guide to Home Orchardng for the Sierra Nevada Foothills" which is available at the Placer County UC Cooperative Extension office located at 11477 E Avenue in the DeWitt Center, Auburn.

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