



The Salt Lake Tribune

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Gardening: Bare (root) essentials

Benefits of planting bare root trees and perennials.

By Maggie Wolf
Special To The Tribune

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It's time to plant "bare root" trees, shrubs and perennials. Don't wait. These plants need to be put into the ground as soon as they are shipped to a local nursery or your house. Your speedy work in early spring will pay big dividends later when your new trees have a healthy root system.

Unlike their potted siblings, which often have a mass of roots circling the bottom of the container, bare root plants are perfect for home gardeners for three reasons: They are less expensive, there is a wider selection and they are easier to plant properly and grow successfully.

What is a bare root plant? » Dug and harvested out of the ground while still dormant, bare root trees have most or all of the soil shaken from their roots. After being gathered, they are sorted, graded, pruned, labeled and sometimes bundled or packaged. These plants are kept fully dormant in refrigerated storage until sold and shipped.



This Suffolk red grape bush is an example of a "bare root" plant that should be planted in early spring. (Al Hartmann / The Salt Lake Tribune)

Don't be confused if you see bare root plants in pots. Some garden centers pot the plants so the bare roots are better protected and customers have a little more time to decide where and when to plant them.

Buying locally » Nurseries and garden centers usually display bare root plants outdoors under an awning. This keeps the packaged bare roots cool during the heat of the day and protected from frost and freezing temperatures at night.

Before purchasing, make sure the bare root plant is still dormant and root packing is moist. Healthy dormant plants have small, tight buds and stems that show green when gently scratched. As plants wake up, sap starts to move into the stems and the buds swell, making the plant more easily damaged and the roots much drier.

Ordering online » Fruit trees and roses are two types of bare root plants commonly sold through catalogs or the Internet. Because bare root plants are fairly lightweight, shipping is relatively inexpensive. Catalog companies offer many species, hybrids and heirloom varieties that are typically not available at local garden centers.

Plants are shipped in cardboard boxes with roots wrapped in moist packing and plastic. Once delivered, unpack plants immediately and soak the roots in tepid water for about two hours. Plant them as soon as possible. If you can't plant them within a day, "heel in" the plants; lay them sideways with the roots in a shallow trench. Cover the roots with moist, well-drained soil. Keep the roots moist until planting.

What to plant » All types of fruit trees, nut trees, berries, roses and ornamental shrubs grow well in northern Utah. Look for bare root fruit trees that are Zone 5 or higher

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Step 1: Dig a hole 3 times wider than the tree or... (Al Hartmann / The Salt Lake Tribune)

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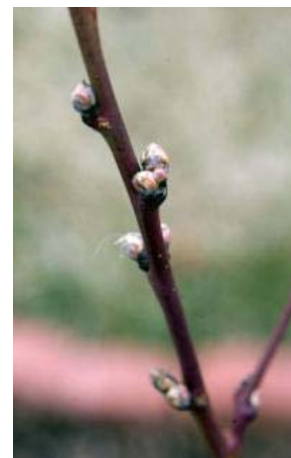
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Swollen buds on a nectarine tree are close to bursting. (Al Hartmann / The Salt Lake Tribune)

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To see if the plant is alive you can nick the bark. If there is green beneath you have a healthy plant. (Al Hartmann / The Salt Lake Tribune)

(a minimum temperature of 20 degrees). Peaches and nectarines prefer sandy or well-drained soil. Pears tolerate heavy soil better than other fruit trees.

Buy dwarf varieties. They are easier to maintain and produce a more manageable amount of fruit than standard types.

Raspberries, loganberries and some blackberries are good bare root plants to purchase. So are strawberry, grape, currant, gooseberry, elderberry, lingonberry, aronia and serviceberry. Grapes are easily grown on fence lines bordering your property. But the area needs to be herbicide free, as grapes are especially susceptible to herbicide damage.

Blueberries are often sold locally, but they require a more acidic soil than is typically found in Utah. They require more soil preparation and closer management to grow successfully.

All types of bare root roses are available and grow

especially well in Utah.

Nut trees are often overlooked as landscape trees, but can provide a bounty of food and shade. In northern Utah, try walnut, black walnut, butternut, hickory, hazelnut (filbert), almond and Chinese chestnut. Pecan trees are hardy to Zone 5, but will rarely produce a crop.

Ornamental shrubs and trees -- such as crabapple, hybrid poplars, lilac, hydrangea and privets -- can be ordered bare root from catalogs. A few are sold at garden centers.

Maggie Wolf, a certified professional horticulturist, gardens and consults in the Salt Lake Valley.

Gardening Classes and Events

Community Garden Coordinator » Clearfield City is looking for a well-organized volunteer with a green thumb to be the Community Garden Coordinator. This person, with help of a planning committee, will decide what kind of garden is needed and whom the garden will serve, get sponsors, manage a budget, choose a name and line up tools, resources and volunteers. Those interested in the position should contact Tracy Heun at 801-525-2793.

Basic landscape design » Learn how to create a new landscape or remodel an existing yard during this three-week course being taught at Thanksgiving Point, 3003 N. Thanksgiving Way, Lehi. The class runs April 6, 13 and 20 and costs \$40 per person. Two times are available: 2 to 4:30 p.m. or 6 to 7:30 p.m. Member discounts available. Call 801-768-7443 to register.

Volunteer in the Garden » On April 10, volunteers will learn how to test soil and add amendments to garden beds during Garden Day at Wasatch Community Gardens. The event runs from 9 to 11:30 a.m. at the Tomato Garden, 800 S. 600 East, and the Fairpark Garden, 1037 W. 300 North, both in Salt Lake City. Volunteers should bring garden gloves and water bottle as the group will fix and build garden trellises for different warm-weather crops and discuss what types of trellises are best for your beans, tomatoes, cucumbers and melons. To volunteer for the event, go to www.wasatchgardens.org

Bare root basics:

Ordering » Shop mail-order catalogs or the Internet for more unusual varieties of woody perennials.

Buying » Purchase plants soon after they arrive at the nursery or store to assure freshness.

Look for » Select plants with tight buds that are still completely dormant. Avoid plants with ripped packaging that allows roots to dry out.

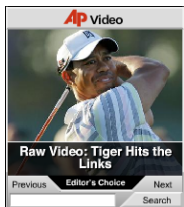
Planting » Put bare root plants into the ground as soon as possible after they arrive at your house.

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