

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).

Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mghelpline@masshort.org.

Bare Root Plants

Are you familiar with bare root plants? Have you ever grown one? Growers dig plants from the ground when dormant and gently remove the soil. The roots are then packed in a light material, such as sphagnum moss, saw dust or shredded paper, moistened and stored in a cool dark place. This means bare root plants are less expensive to store and ship. Without the weight of soil, large trees are easily moved by a single gardener. Bare root plants establish themselves quickly in a garden. The selection of plant material available may be larger than at a local nursery and the cost is usually less. Mail order companies will hold your order until it is the right time to plant in your zone. Many local nurseries are now starting to offer their own bare root plants for sale, growing them in non-soil beds from which the plants are removed when they are sold and are best planted immediately.

Once a bare root plant is received, remove it from its packing. If it is not moist, add water, but do not saturate. Bare root plants should be planted as soon as you receive them, but may be stored for a week if you keep the roots moist, and the plant in a cool place. Never let the roots dry out or freeze. To plant, soak the roots in a bucket of water, 20 to 30 minutes for perennials, 1 to 2 hours (or up to 5 hours) for trees and shrubs. This rehydrates the roots, making them more pliable. Choose a site based on the plant's sun/shade requirements. Dig a hole twice the size of the root spread in the form of a wide shallow saucer. Do not mix fertilizer into the bottom of the hole, it will burn the roots. Amend the soil you dug out of the hole with compost or well rotted manure.

Shovel some soil back into the center of the hole to create a firm mound. Then place the root ball on the mound, spreading the roots gently down the sides of the mound as evenly around as possible. Prune away any broken or damaged roots. Find the crown of the plant—the point where the roots which belong underground become the stem which should be above ground. Lay a long handled shovel across the hole so that you can determine that the crown of the root ball is slightly above the edge of the hole. This will allow for the settling of the new soil. Backfill the hole, settling and gently tamping down the soil keeping the plant straight up as you go. Water deeply.

Perennials will need to be watered daily for a week and weekly for the remainder of the season (unless it rains). Trees and shrubs need to be watered daily for a week and then weekly for the next two years whenever the ground is not frozen. One gallon of water a week for every square foot of the root ball area is a good rule of thumb. Trees may need to be staked for the first year as the weight of the leaves may overbalance the size of the root system. Mulch the top of the area with 2 to 3 inches of organic mulch, keeping the mulch off the crown of perennials or away from the bark of trees.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>