

Demystifying Bare Root Plants

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Every year during the plethora of spring plant sales in the northwest, a mysterious item called a “bare root plant” appears on the palette of choices for our gardens. For many of us, this plant sans pot, burlap and even soil is bewildering. Bare root planting is more beneficial to many plants than any other method of planting. Embrace this opportunity to get great plant choices into your yard this coming spring!

Why Bare Root is Better

A study done at Cornell University revealed that bare root trees dug for sale have 200% more tree roots than trees in ball and burlap. Potted plants run the risk of having their root systems circle around in their pot, creating girdling roots. Girdling roots cut off the movement of water and nutrients to a plant, weakening and sometimes killing it. Planting from bare root allows you to spread the plant roots out properly in the planting hole and to avoid planting too deeply, a common planting mistake.

Bare root plants are less expensive to purchase and produce and create less waste. Transporting and transplanting a bare root plant is easier on your back and requires less specialized equipment. You can find larger, more mature plants in bare root form and get a dynamite selection of fruiting plants.

Get Ready

Do your homework about plant choices. Edible plants which are available in bare root form include fruiting trees, shrubs, cane and vine fruit, asparagus, strawberries and rhubarb. You can also find fruiting native shrubs and trees for garden wildlife. Be prepared to plant the day you purchase. If you cannot plant them the same day of purchase, store them out of the sun with protection over the root system for no longer than a week. Stake trees when planting.

Finding Plants

Shop Seattle Tilth’s Early Spring Edible Plant Sale on March 19 for fruiting plants selected for our area, including rare finds. We will have our educators on hand to help you make good plant choices and advise you on their care. Local nurseries also have their annual bare root sales in early February. You can also support local Conservation Districts with their pre-order native plant sales and check local grower’s catalogs.

To get more details about sourcing plants contact the Garden Hotline at (206) 633-0224 or help@gardenhotline.org. To learn about planting bare root plants read our almanac article for February: seattletilth.org/learn/resources/almanac/February.

Seattle Tilth inspires and educates people to grow food organically, conserve natural resources and support local food systems in order to cultivate a healthy urban environment and community.

For more information, visit seattletilth.org.