



## Planning & Planting Guide

This guide aims to provide all the advice and support you will need on your journey to [Step 3 of the Young Tree Champion programme](#), 'Delivering a project.' You'll grow and care for your beautiful trees and hedgerows and share your experience with the wider school and community. There are sections on planning, planting and caring for your trees and hedgerows, as well as learning opportunities for your Young Tree Champions and how to promote your planting day as part of our national #ForceForNature campaign. If you have any questions, please visit [youngtreechampions.org](http://youngtreechampions.org) or email [schools@treecouncil.org.uk](mailto:schools@treecouncil.org.uk).

On behalf of The Tree Council, we hope your Young Tree Champions enjoy planting, connecting, sharing and learning from trees to help tackle the climate and nature crises.

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*"There can be no greater legacy than giving young people the tools they need to save our planet."*

**Sir David Attenborough**



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## Planning your site

**Planting trees and hedgerows is a long-term investment.** Your trees will live for decades to come so it is vital to plan well and embed your project into the school curriculum and improvement plan. Choosing the right location for your trees or hedgerow is important, as is considering the aftercare and maintenance. For example, you may well have a space on the other side of the school grounds, but will that distance become a barrier to classes being taken there? Will it make the aftercare more difficult or time-consuming?

Our pre-recorded '[Let's Get Planting Webinar](#)' is a great resource to help you approach your planning. Key things to consider are:

### Planning your site

- **Choosing a suitable site:** Ideally you should choose somewhere that gets a good amount of sun, isn't too windy and doesn't become waterlogged in winter. Also make sure you don't plant under electrical cables, or too close to building foundations.
- **Working out how much space is needed:**
  - Container trees: These fruit trees have been carefully selected to grow in a container and will reach 2-3m tall after ten years.
  - Broadleaf trees: The trees selected will grow to up to 6m tall (depending on the species) after ten years and need to be planted between 5-8m apart.
  - Orchard trees: The fruit trees selected will grow to 3-4m high after ten years and should be planted 5-6m apart from each other.
  - Hedges: Your hedge will grow to 16-18m in length and as wide as you let it – it's best to manage it by trimming as you need to, preferably in winter. If you're planting a hedge along a boundary (for example, at the edge of your playground), plant 75cm-1m from the wall, fence or railings to give it space to fill out as it grows.
- **Proximity of the planting site to school building:** Easy access to the planting site is vital to make sure students and staff will use it regularly. Make sure the site is accessible for all students, including those who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids.
- **Whole-school consultation:** The more you involve Young Tree Champions and staff at all stages of planning and design, the stronger the sense of ownership they'll have and the better the long-term care of your trees or hedgerow will be.
- **What your planting day might look like:** Your planting day is a great opportunity for learning, celebration and wider community engagement but careful planning is key. Will your chosen site



*A 7-year-old tree, hard-pruned to produce lots of fruit!*



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allow lots of children to get involved? Are there access restrictions or is space limited? Is there capacity for other activities to take place at the same time as the planting (e.g. making labels for the trees) so that everyone is engaged?

- **Aftercare and maintenance:** The trees must be mulched and watered, especially in the summer holidays, and the base kept free from grass and weeds for the first three years after planting. By making sure your planting site is easily accessible and within easy reach of facilities, like a tap to fill up a watering can, you'll make future maintenance much more straightforward.
- **Embedding the trees into your teaching:** All of the above can and should be done with Young Tree Champion involvement. Each step has fantastic potential for real-life connection and learning, caring and sharing opportunities to help them become a #ForceForNature. Choosing a site that has good possibilities for future engagement is really important.

Your trees will require some vital care in their early years, such as watering, mulching and protection. Taking care of young trees allows them to settle into their new home, put down strong roots and become more self-sufficient in the future. Good care in their early years will pay off later on.

## Preparing a Management Plan

The key to success, as always, is **good planning**. To achieve this, a simple management plan should be developed with both children and staff. [Click here to access a template](#) for you to tailor. The purpose of the plan is to set out key tasks and responsibilities. It should cover the crucial first three to four years after planting, laying out all annual tasks and who will do them. This should be created and completed with the children to get everyone thinking about the trees' needs.

The sections you may want to include in your management plan could include:

- Your aims for your trees or hedgerows.
- An overview of your work plan for the year, which might include watering, mulching, weeding, pruning and checking tree stakes and ties are properly in place.
- Possible community events through the year, e.g. Spring Blossom Festival, [Apple Day](#) or [Wassailing](#), National Hedgerow Week. Find out more about The Tree Council's [seasonal campaigns here](#).

## Top management tips

1. Find out if you have a [local volunteer Tree Warden](#) who can support your project and offer expertise
2. Involve the Young Tree Champions with every step of the project e.g. planning, planting, health checks, aftercare and beyond!



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## Planting and Growing

The Tree Council's National Tree Week, which takes place annually at the end of November, traditionally marks the beginning of the winter tree planting season. Planting over winter when the trees are dormant and the ground is moist, allows bare root trees the best chance to establish before the spring, when their leaves will begin to develop.

'Bare root' trees, like the ones you'll receive, will have been lifted from the ground at their tree nurseries a few days before they reach your school and will arrive in bags. You'll need to plant them **within five days of their arrival**; otherwise, they may die.

When your trees or hedge whips arrive:

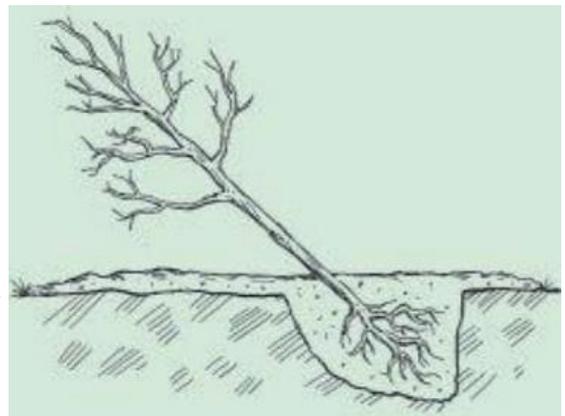
- Unpack them from the box, open the bag covering the roots and pour in some water to make the roots damp (but not waterlogged).
- Seal the root bag and store the trees outside in a sheltered spot outdoors and make sure they're protected from any bouts of frost.
- **Every day until planting takes place**, check that the tree roots are still damp.

If you're not going to be able to plant your trees in their final position within five days of their delivery, you'll need to take them out of their bags and 'heel in' the young trees or hedge whips to protect them.

## Heeling in your trees and hedgerows

This is the best way of storing bare root trees if you're not able to plant them straight away.

1. Dig a trench in good, fresh, moist soil that won't dry out or become waterlogged. Alternatively, you could use a large pot.
2. Dig the trench with a sloping back, as pictured, deep enough for the tree roots to be completely covered.
3. If you have multiple trees in bundles, separate them out and space them evenly along the trench. This is important to prevent the roots from drying out and, if you are planting an evergreen species, to stop the plants from heating up.



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4. Put the trees in the trench with their roots completely covered but their tops out.
5. Cover the roots with soil up to the root collar and firm the soil lightly but treading it down to remove any big air pockets.

### Useful links about planting and growing

- [The Orchard Project - Growing fruit trees in containers](#)
- [Frank Matthews - bare root trees planting video](#)
- [Frank Matthews - bare root trees planting instructions](#)
- [The Tree Council Planting Guide](#)
- [How to plant trees and hedgerows webinar](#)
- [The Orchard Project – Helping young trees establish in the summer](#)



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## How to plant your broadleaf or orchard fruit trees

When your bare root trees arrive, unpack them from the box, open the bag covering the roots and pour in some water to make the roots damp (not waterlogged). Seal the root bag and store the trees outside, protected from bouts of frost. **Every day until planting**, check that the tree roots are still damp.

1. Keep the tree roots damp and in their bags until the very last minute before planting. This is so they are not exposed to the air which will dry them out.
2. Carefully **mark out** where your trees will be planted based on your site planning.
3. **Dig a square hole** about 80-100cm wide, deep enough to accommodate your tree roots.
4. **Break up the subsoil** at the bottom of the hole and remove any weeds or large stones.
5. Mix in a layer of **peat-free compost** and a scoop of **mycorrhizal fungi powder** if you have any.
6. Push the **stake** provided vertically into the soil pit, leaving 75cm of the stake above the soil level.
7. Remove the tree from its bag and **position it in the hole so that the stem is about 8-10cm from the stake**, making sure that the final soil level is the same as when the tree was in the nursery (you can often see the soil mark on bare root trees). Make sure the **graft join** (see glossary) is well above soil level and that no roots are poking out above the surface.
8. **Backfill the hole**, shaking the tree gently up and down so that the soil gets between and around the root and then firm the soil gently with your foot.
9. Cut 1m of the **hessian tie** provided and secure the top of the stake to the stem, in a figure of eight.
10. Secure your **wire guard** around the base of the tree. Wrap and interlink the ends of the wire guard to prevent it from being removed. Make sure you use gloves when handling the wire guards.
11. Apply a thick layer (roughly 7cm thick and 1m in diameter) of biodegradable mulch (like wood chipping) around the base of your tree, but don't let the mulch touch the trunk as this may lead to decay. [Mulch is vital](#) to conserve moisture and prevent weeds and grass from growing.
12. **If the soil is dry, water well** with two large watering cans of water (20 litres) per tree.
13. **During dry periods**, water every week with two watering cans.

Ref Gardener's World



*Hessian tie securing tree to stake*



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## How to plant your hedgerow

Your hedgerow whips will be 60cm tall and will arrive bare rooted. They will have been lifted from the ground at their nurseries a few days before they reach your school. Their roots will need to be kept moist and must be planted within five days of arrival, otherwise the young trees may die.

1. If you are planting a **boundary hedge**, position it about 75cm-1m from the boundary wall, fence or railings. This will allow the hedge to fill out as it grows.
2. On the planting day, it is important that the roots are kept in their bags until the very last minute before planting. This is so they are not exposed to the air which will dry them out.
3. **Good soil preparation** beforehand is key and will give your hedge the best start in life. Don't plant in a space that is prone to waterlogging.
4. **Prepare the ground** by rotavating (digging over) a strip 60-90cm wide and one spade blade deep which should remove all existing vegetation including grass and weeds which will compete with your young hedge plants for moisture and nutrients.
5. Take the whips directly from the bag.
6. You can either plant your whips in a **straight line in a trench** or in a **staggered double row**, depending how dense you need your hedge to be. Either way, it's best to plant **four to six hedge plants per metre**.
7. When planting, push the spade fully into the ground and wiggle it backwards and forwards to create a slot. Carefully position the tree in the slot **spreading out the roots**, ensuring the planting depth is correct. The point where the roots flare out from the stem should be level with the surrounding soil.
8. Once planted at the right level, make sure the soil is **well-packed** around the roots. Firm the soil lightly with your foot.
9. Apply a thick layer (c7cm) of **biodegradable mulch** (like wood chipping) around the base of your tree, but don't let the mulch touch the trunk as this may lead to decay. [Mulch is vital](#) as it conserves moisture and prevents weed growth.
10. **If the soil is dry, water the plants** with two or three large watering cans of water (20-30 litres) per metre.
11. **During dry periods**, continue watering every week.



*Hedge planted along a boundary in two staggered rows*



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## How to plant your fruit trees in containers

When your bare root trees arrive, unpack them from the box, open the bag covering the roots and pour in some water to make the roots damp (but not waterlogged). Seal the root bag and store the trees outside in a sheltered spot, protected from any bouts of frost. **Every day until planting takes place**, check that the tree roots are still damp.

Choose pots or make containers that are 1m deep and 1m wide. You can reuse discarded pallets, use large wooden barrels or make a raised bed. Containers should have **drainage holes** in the bottom to prevent roots becoming waterlogged if overwatered or due to rain. Raising the container off the ground by resting on slats or legs of some sort will help drainage. **Please note containers are not provided.**

1. On the planting day, it is important that the roots are kept in their bags until the very last minute before planting. This is so they are not exposed to the air which will dry them out.
2. Place plenty of **small pieces of broken clay pots or stones** in the bottom of the containers to retain the soil during watering.
3. Add in your good-quality **peat free compost**.
4. Place the tree centrally and gently spread the roots out.
5. Add more **peat free compost** on top, leaving space for mulch. Make sure the graft join (see glossary) is well above soil level and that no roots are poking out above the surface.
6. Push the **stake** provided vertically into the soil pit, leaving 75cm of the stake above the soil level.
7. Cut 1m of the **hessian tie** provided and secure the top of the stake to the stem, in a figure of eight.
8. Secure your **wire guard** around the base of the tree. Wrap and interlink the ends of the wire guard to prevent it from being removed.
9. Make sure you use gloves when handling the wire guards.
10. Add a thick layer (around 7cm deep and cover the full diameter of the container) of **biodegradable mulch** (like wood chipping), but don't let the mulch touch the trunk as this may lead to decay. The mulch will help provide vital nutrients for the young trees and retain water.
11. **If the soil is dry, water well** with two large watering cans of water (20 litres) per tree.
12. **During dry periods**, continue watering every week.



*Hessian tie securing tree to stake*



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### Care and maintenance:

It's important to bear in mind that trees in containers will need extra care, especially with watering during the spring and summer. Container-grown fruit need careful watering throughout the summer to prevent the fruits dropping before they ripen, and the leaves browning around the edges. When watering in the spring, incorporate controlled-release organic fertiliser pellets or feed fortnightly with a high-potassium liquid tomato feed.

Position your container so that the tree gets lots of direct sunlight but not constantly throughout the day. Keeping the container shaded at some points of the day will help keep the roots cool and prevent water evaporation. The container should be secured or sheltered from strong winds.

To avoid the roots becoming pot bound, re-pot in winter every year or alternate years until it is fully grown.



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## Planning your planting day

Your planting day is one of the highlights of your project and can be a fantastic way to get the whole school involved. Ahead of the day, it's a good idea to create a folder of resources that can be kept somewhere convenient for all volunteers and staff to access. This should include:

- A map of the site that details the different varieties and rootstock (each tree will have a label with these details)
- Relevant teaching resources
- Your [Management Plan](#) including information about maintenance and aftercare

### Additional tools and equipment you may need:

- Measuring tape and something to mark out where you will plant your trees
- Gardening/sturdy gloves for all those involved
- Spades and forks for digging pits
- Stakes and hessian ties for each tree (included in your tree packs)
- Containers (if planting in a container)
- Compost and/or mycorrhizal fungi powder (not provided) to help your trees establishing
- Footwear that can get muddy
- A wheelbarrow to transport the trees / mulch / compost / tools
- Mulch (deciduous wood chip) – one wheelbarrow per tree. Mulch can be ordered from garden centres. It's also worth getting in touch with your local tree surgeon who may be able to donate some to you. Sites such as [arbtalk](#) or [freewoodchip](#) also facilitate bulk deliveries of wood chip.

## The big day!

The planting day itself is an opportunity to celebrate your new trees with the whole school community (Covid-19 restrictions permitting of course). If possible, consider inviting parents, school neighbours, community organisations and the local press. You can share apple juice, tasty fruit-based baking and other treats with them to add to the celebrations.

Try to involve as many children as possible in the planting; perhaps each class could be responsible for a tree. There's plenty to be done for each tree – digging the pit, holding the tree in position while someone else backfills, staking, guarding and mulching. Many hands make light work!



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## Caring and Community

Caring for your trees and hedgerows is so important.

For the first three years or so, the main tasks will involve:

- **Watering** regularly from spring until September – 20 litres per tree once a week during dry weather – consider making a plan for children living locally or any local volunteers to water the trees during the summer holidays.
- Maintaining a **good layer of biodegradable mulch** (like wood chipping) at the base of your trees to conserve moisture and suppress weed growth.
- Keeping the base of the tree **free from grass and weeds**.
- **Guarding** the trees from strimmers, ball games, rabbits and deer.
- Looking out for **signs of stress** to the trees such as yellowing of the leaves which may indicate lack of water or nutrients.

**Top tip:** Add just a tablespoon of organic liquid fertiliser (or even sugary water!) to the first waterings in the spring to help your trees to survive and thrive!

Once the trees are established after 3-4 years, annual tasks involve:

- **Formative pruning** which helps the trees fight off infections by allowing for good ventilation. This will also encourage your trees to produce more fruit. Pruning your trees can sound daunting but you can find excellent information and guidance on [The Orchard Project website](#).
- Applying an organic peat-free mulch, or organic **multi-purpose fertiliser** to the base of the trees annually in spring (March) to give them a boost.
- Enjoying the **new wildlife** that your trees and hedge habitats will attract.
- **Harvesting** once the fruit tree starts to bear fruit, after about three years.

Different tasks happen at different times in the year, and all offer rich learning experiences and opportunities for celebration, a key activity for any Young Tree Champion project!



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## Engaging your community

From the start of your Young Tree Champion project, there will be opportunities for you to invite wider participation.

Having regular events and work parties in the school grounds throughout the year and advertising them locally will ensure people know what's happening when and how to get involved. Ideas of how to do this include:

- Community skills mapping exercises to see what help and expertise may be available locally.
- Consultation on how the trees or hedgerows might benefit community needs.
- Annual celebrations, such as Apple Day on 21 October, [National Hedgerow Week](#) in May/June or Blossom Days in spring. Find out more about The Tree Council's [seasonal campaigns here](#).

## Top tips for engaging the community

1. Use your [Management Plan](#) to map out potential opportunities to involve the wider community over the year ahead. This could be as part of working parties where seasonal tree tasks are completed and/or celebratory events.
2. Involving keen school neighbours can pay dividends when it comes to the vital watering schedule in the first few years of the trees' lives. Having local people involved will help to ensure that the trees are looked after, especially during dry periods at Easter and hot summer holidays.
3. By carrying out a community skills mapping exercise, you can build up a good picture of the local community needs and see how your trees or hedgerows can help to meet those needs. Who makes up the whole local community? Are there any issues that could be mitigated by the trees or hedgerows? For example, maybe there is a lack of public green space for nature connection.
4. Often schools decide to turn events such as [Apple Day and Wassailing](#) into annual events. Over time these events may grow and evolve, as more people hear about them and want to be involved. Events like these can help to ensure the school is a valued community hub, whilst instilling within the children a real sense of civic responsibility and pride.
5. Why not invite other local schools to attend any events or working parties that you run? This can be a great way of developing relationships with other schools and inspiring them to set up Young Tree Champions projects of their own.

## Useful links to further resources

- See [Club News](#) for ideas and inspiration
- Find out if you have a [local volunteer Tree Warden](#) who can support your project and offer expertise



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## Health & Safety

**School grounds should always be safe spaces for young people to learn and grow.**

But managing the Covid-19 outbreak has presented further challenges in keeping students safe. Getting outside to plant and care for your new trees or hedgerow is a great way to get young people learning outdoors, where transmission rates much lower. Additionally, there are many mental health benefits of spending time outdoors, so time caring for your new trees or hedgerow can be a stress-buster for young people who have faced many challenges in recent months.

“School grounds should not be as safe as possible but as safe as necessary’. In its risk declaration it says, ‘Since the world is full of risks, children need to learn to recognize [sic] and respond to them in order to protect themselves and develop their own risk-assessment capabilities.’”

**The International School  
Grounds Alliance**

What else should be considered in relation to health and safety when thinking about the everyday use of school grounds?

## Risk is important

We cannot create a world with no risks. In fact, some risk is really important. As children grow, they need to understand how to make decisions about risk – otherwise they will not know when they could be placing themselves in danger.

The Health and Safety Executive says ‘play is great for children’s wellbeing and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.’ This is equally relevant to outdoor learning. When you consider the activities you take outside, apply a risk-benefit approach. Think first about the benefits of that activity, then consider the risks in undertaking that activity.

## Low levels of risk

Once you have completed a general risk-benefit assessment for the site you are using, [see LTL guidance](#), and for the general theme of taking lessons outdoors, you will **not** need to undertake a new risk-benefit assessment every time you go outside. However, if you are going to undertake a riskier activity – such as having a fire outside – then you should undertake a risk-benefit assessment specifically for this.



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## Safeguarding and Covid-19

Safeguarding your children, staff and parents is vital. Please make sure you follow your school's safeguarding policy and procedures, keep up to date with the latest government legislation and guidance regarding [safeguarding and child protection](#) to protect everyone involved in an event or activity. If your event directly involves the attendance of The Tree Council or other external help, please make sure you carry out a safeguarding risk assessment. In addition, make sure you have parental consent for any photos that you decide to take and don't use a personal phone.

### Top tips for health & safety

1. Think about the benefits of any planting activity before you think about the risks, then balance them up.
2. Undertake a risk-benefit assessment at the start of each academic year so that you are ready to take your class outside amongst the trees whenever you want to.
3. Involve students in assessing risks and benefits so that they can learn to make judgements for themselves.
4. Build confidence in staff by allowing them to shadow more experienced colleagues when teaching outdoors to help them develop new skills.
5. Don't put your risk-assessments away and never look at them! Make sure they are reviewed each year. Here is a [risk assessment template](#) to get you started.



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## Press and media

**Engaging press and media can seem daunting, but it's so important to engage others - it's all part of being a #ForceForNature.** The more you raise awareness of your amazing project in your local community, the wider the impact your project will have. Engaging with the media is also a great way to raise awareness about the value of trees and nature.

## How to engage with local media

Telling the story of your own project and what makes it unique is one of the best ways to engage a wider audience. Local media love to hear about people in their area doing interesting things, so they will be eager to hear about your incredible Young Tree Champions project. Activities to consider include:

- Write a simple press release (we have drafted a [pro forma press release](#) you can use).
- Share your press release with local newspapers and other local groups - for example, any 'We love our town' community groups.
- Invite your local councillors/MPs/Mayor/any local celebs to your events.
- Invite local press to your planting events. If any local dignitaries are attending, make sure to let the journalist know as it may increase interest in attending.
- Make sure you have got publicity consent from parents and young people involved in the event, if sharing with us please use our [child publicity consent form](#) and [adult publicity consent form](#).
- Take lots of photographs, making sure you have parent consent of course. Take a look at these top tips for [taking photos on your phone](#). We know you may be very busy co-ordinating things in your planting day – so consider asking a colleague to be responsible for getting some good photos and videos – or nominate some students to be your 'media officers', using the school camera.

## Other ways to promote your Young Tree Champion project include:

- Talking about your Young Tree Champion project on social media #ForceForNature.
- Contacting your local radio stations – they will often be really interested in hearing what is happening locally.
- Writing a blog or making a video for the school's website.



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## Logo/branding

When spreading the word about your project, please mention that it is part of The Tree Council's Young Tree Champions programme. You can use the [Young Tree Champions logo](#) when writing website updates and producing any printed material for your project. Please use this logo, not the main Tree Council logo.

## Top tips for engaging press and media

1. Consider press, media and social media as part of your planning for your planting day.
2. Record all the activities you do, by taking photos, video or audio recordings.
3. If your school has social media channels, please tag @thetreecouncil and use #ForceForNature – we will share and retweet some of the great updates we spot.
4. Involve students who are interested in writing, photography, video blogging and social media to explore their interests through the project.

## Links to further resources

- [Young Tree Champions - proforma press release](#)
- Downloadable [Young Tree Champions logo](#) for social media, website etc



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## Glossary

**Backfill:** Refill the hole with the material originally dug out.

**Bare root:** This means that the tree will not have any soil on its roots. Bare root trees are only available in winter when trees are dormant.

**Graft join:** The notch above the roots in a grafted tree – see right image

**Mycorrhizal fungi:** Fungi found in most soil that have a beneficial relationship with tree roots. The fungal hyphae (thread-like structures) spread far and wide, extending the tree's roots and bringing water and nutrients back to the tree to help it thrive. *(Definition adapted from The Orchard Project).*



**Mulch:** Mulch helps stop weeds growing, improves the soil around your plants and retains moisture. Non-biodegradable mulches like pebbles, gravel or slate look decorative and prevent weed growth and competition, but won't help your soil, while biodegradable ones like wood chippings (what we refer to and recommend throughout the guide) release nutrients into the soil as they break down. You can find out more about [mulch here](#).

**Root collar:** The root collar is the point where the tree roots and stem meet. Look for changes in texture and colour at the base of the tree stem.

**Sub soil:** The layer of earth that is just below the surface or top soil.

**Whip:** A whip refers to a very young, slender tree that hasn't yet got any branches. It's called a whip because it looks very much like a whip!



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Weblinks: [youngtreechampions.org.uk](http://youngtreechampions.org.uk)  
[treecouncil.org.uk](http://treecouncil.org.uk)