UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources

UC Master Gardener Program
Mariposa County

# Over the Garden Fence

## Common Bare Root Fruit Tree Fables

*By Bob Labozetta (UC Master Gardener, Mariposa)*

January into March is the time to plant bare-root fruit trees. Avoid these common misconceptions or fables...

**Fable 1: Plant at least 2 of the same variety within proximity of each other.**

Fruit trees require either cross-pollination (with another variety of the same fruit) or self-pollination (pollinated by pollen from another flower on the same fruit tree or, in some cases, by pollen from the same flower).

Most varieties of peaches, nectarines, apricots, and sour cherries are self-pollinating. Pears are too, but cross-pollination may result in larger yields. About half of plum varieties are self-fruitful. Although most citrus trees are self-fruitful, larger harvests are often the result of cross-pollination.

Be sure to check with your nursery source whether a particular fruit tree requires cross-pollination from another variety of that fruit. For example, many apples require cross-pollination from another variety that blooms at the same time. If so, plant the trees within a range of no more than 50 feet.

**Fable 2: Fill planting holes with fertilizer and compost.**

Newly planted fruit trees prefer native soil, not soil enhanced with amendments or nitrogen-based fertilizer.

Adapting to native soil conditions, a newly-planted tree's roots will grow beyond the planting hole within a year. Significantly enriched the soil placed back in the hole while planting frequently causes the roots to circle around inside the planting hole creating a weak root system and possible root girdling leading ultimately to death.

**Fable 3: Newly planted trees need to be staked.**

Generally, an unstaked tree will grow stronger than a staked tree as it acclimates to winds. The traditional purposes of staking a young tree are to support, anchor, and protect a tree while forcing straight growth. Your environment (prevailing heavy winds and steep land slope) may make this mandatory but, in most cases, staking is unnecessary.

Under most conditions, unstaked trees have more trunk strength and larger girth.

**Fable 4: Seal pruned branches to protect them from disease and insects.**

Putting a "band-aid" on pruning cuts is not necessary and can be detrimental to a fruit tree. Unlike human wounds that heal by scabbing over, trees seal off damaged wood by growing healthy new wood around the impairment. The wound is effectively isolated by a barricade of tissue cells that keep any infection from being transmitted to the rest of the tree.

Sealing tree cuts can be harmful. Dangers include the impairment of healing air circulation to the cut and trapping any bacteria, fungus, or other disease-causing organisms from elsewhere on the bark inside the cut.

---

*UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County are located at 5009 Fairgrounds Rd., Mariposa. For more gardening and event information, visit our website (http://cemariposa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/) and Facebook page (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County). UC Master Gardeners staff a Helpline serving Mariposa County, including Greeley Hill, Coulterville, and Lake Don Pedro (209-966-7078 or mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu). Listen to us on the radio at KRYZ 98.5 FM on Wednesdays at 2 pm and Saturdays at 5 pm.*