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Bare root pears and plums

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The plum is a fruit that considered to be a yardstick of quality. Everyone has heard, "Plum good!", "Plum crazy", "Yum, plum pudding" and finally a quote by the author Kirby Larson, "Our actions make the fragrance of our lives. Would you smell of plums? Or vinegar? Interestingly, the pear tree is mentioned in literature mostly in a romantic context. Other than that, not much else has been written about pears in poetry or prose except they taste good!

To satisfy your passion for home grown fruit, Bloomers's have a number of plum and pear varieties to plant this spring. If a gardener is interested in growing fruit in their yard other than the reliable apple, these two fruit trees are good choices. And, to lower the cost, consider planting bare root trees. Plums and pears are specifically mentioned here but this information can be applied to most fruit trees, including apples, apricots, and cherry plums or cherries.

What are the criteria for bare root trees? These trees are usually field grown for one to three years; they are undercut and dug in the fall or spring; they are handled with no soil left around the roots; and they are stored with moist roots and dormant tops until they are planted.

There are several advantages to planting bare root stock. Bare root plants are usually one half to two thirds the cost of container plants. Longer root lengths are possible on bare root plants because the weight of the root ball without soil is minimal and this is one of the easiest ways to add a permanent, food producing plant into your garden.

The best time to plant bare root trees is while the plant is still in its dormant stage. They should be planted before they start

"waking up". Ideally, you want your tree to start developing its new permanent roots in its permanent home. In the Grand Rapids area this is usually late April to early May but the time may vary from year to year. Plums will wake up first so they should be planted early. Fruit trees like pears start waking up later so you can wait a bit longer to plant those trees.

Dig the hole at least twice the diameter of the root mass, taking care to loosen the sides and bottom of the hole so the young roots can grow beyond the hole. Some planting directions suggest a hole of 3 by 3 feet. The width of the hole is more important than the depth because root systems of fruit trees tend to grow more horizontally than vertically.

Keep topsoil and subsoil separate. Blend some amendments into the excavated top soil. This will be used as backfill for your tree. Beware! If high organic amendments such as manure or new compost are placed in the hole, the roots get "lazy" and are discouraged from growing out of their new home because the soil is too rich. The best amendments are bonemeal, well composted leaves, soft rock phosphate, kelp meal or similar materials that should be mixed with the previously removed topsoil and placed in the bottom of the hole where most of the active root growth will occur.

Prune off any damaged roots just above where the root is broken and any roots that cross each other or unusually long roots. Crossed roots tend to "strangle" each other and die back. The tree lost several feeder roots when dug up so this root loss must be balanced by pruning some branches allowing the newly planted roots to feed the top of the tree.

Prune all broken and crossed branches but leave healthy, plump buds on upper tree branches. When planting, put about 1/3 of the topsoil mix in the hole and place the tree in, spreading the roots. Avoid any green plant material as they emit methane gas when decomposing which harms young roots. Put in the rest of the topsoil and lightly tamp down. Eliminate any air pockets and ensure that roots are in good contact with the soil by "puddling" the roots with large quantities of water. Fill the hole and let the water soak into the soil. After water has soaked in, fill the hole with subsoil and tamp it

firmly keeping the stem upright. You may not have to water again until the leaves start to come out.

Lastly, adding a layer of compost and mulch will give you tree a good start and prevent weeds from growing. Mulch around the base of the tree giving the trunk some space to breath. Mulching directly up against the trunk of your tree can cause more harm than good because it's a good environment for rodents.

Bloomer's have a number of plums and pears adapted for this area. Pembina, Toka, Mount Royal, Pipestone, Superior, and Waneta are all good fruit producing plum trees. Double flowering plum produces numerous flowers but no fruit. Pear varieties include Summer Crisp and Early Gold Pear.