



## Getting Dirty Garden Guide™ 108 : Advantages of Using Bare-Root Plant Material in the Spring and Fall

### Introduction

Bare-root plants are an excellent option for gardeners looking to get a jump start on their landscaping, all while saving money and improving the ease of planting. Whether you're looking to add perennials, shrubs, or trees, bare-root plant material can be a highly beneficial and cost-effective choice. This guide will cover the advantages of using bare-root plants in the spring or fall, how to handle them, and tips for making the planting process easier and more efficient.

### Advantages of Using Bare-Root Plant Material

1. **Ease of Planting** Bare-root plants come without soil and are typically sold in dormant stages, making them easier to handle and plant. Because they have a smaller footprint compared to potted plants, they can be transported and handled more easily. They also usually come with fewer pests or diseases, offering an advantage over container plants.
2. **Ease of Handling** Bare-root plants are lightweight and compact, making them more manageable than container plants. Their reduced size allows for easy storage until you're ready to plant. Additionally, you can store them for a short period in a cool, damp place if necessary before planting, giving you a bit more flexibility in your planting schedule.
3. **Lower Cost** Bare-root plants are generally less expensive than container-grown plants. Because they are sold during their dormant period and do not need to be watered or cared for until planted, the cost to produce them is lower. This translates to a lower price for the gardener, which can add up to significant savings if you are planning to plant large areas or multiple varieties.
4. **Ease of Establishment** Bare-root plants have a better chance of establishing strong root systems when planted correctly. Because they are dormant, they can focus their energy on establishing their roots rather than supporting top growth. This gives them a solid head start compared to container-grown plants that may struggle to transition from a confined space.

### Best Times to Plant Bare-Root Material: Spring or Fall?

- **Spring:** Planting bare-root material in the spring allows the plants to establish their roots during the growing season, leading to healthy, vigorous growth in the summer. It's ideal for perennial flowers, trees, and shrubs that benefit from the warmer weather.
- **Fall:** Fall is an excellent time to plant bare-root materials as the soil is still warm enough to promote root growth, but the cooler air allows the plant to rest. This dormant period can lead to faster growth in the spring when the plant awakens.

## Bed Preparation and Planting Tips

1. **Choose the Right Location:** Always choose a location suitable for your plant's light and moisture needs. Whether it's full sun, partial shade, or a shady spot, make sure the site is ideal for your specific plant type.
2. **Soil Preparation:** Prepare your planting bed by loosening the soil to a depth of about 12-18 inches. This will give the roots space to spread and establish. Incorporate organic matter, like compost, to improve soil structure and fertility. This is especially helpful for bare-root plants, as it encourages faster root growth.
3. **Digging the Planting Holes:** Bare-root plants require a hole that's wide and deep enough to accommodate their root system comfortably. For most shrubs and trees, dig a hole that's approximately 1.5 times the width of the root system, and deep enough to plant the root crown at soil level.
4. **Watering and Mulching:** After planting, water lightly and thoroughly to ensure good root-to-soil contact. Mulch around the plant with 2-3 inches of organic mulch to help retain moisture, suppress weeds, and maintain a consistent temperature.

## Tools to Make Planting More Efficient

1. **Stihl Powered Auger:** A powered auger is a fantastic tool for efficiently digging holes for bare-root plants, especially if you have a large area to plant. The Stihl brand offers powerful augers that are easy to use and perfect for breaking through tough soil or large areas. They come in various sizes to suit different plant types, so you can quickly dig holes to the right depth and width. It also reduces physical strain on your body and speeds up the entire planting process.
2. **Garden Trowel or Spade:** While a powered auger can handle most of the work, a garden trowel or spade is helpful for fine-tuning the hole and digging around the roots to ensure they're properly positioned.
3. **Root Pruning Shears:** Bare-root plants sometimes arrive with tangled or damaged roots. Using root pruning shears can help remove any damaged roots and encourage better growth once planted.
4. **Watering Can or Hose with Dramm™ Water Breaker:** For consistent and gentle watering, use a watering can or hose with a nozzle that has a soft, fine spray. Avoid blasting the roots with too much water pressure, which can disrupt their placement in the soil.

## Additional Tips for Success:

- **Root Drench:** After the plant is installed and gently backfilled I treat each plant with a root drench. I do not believe in packing the soil tightly around the plant base because any rain or watering will simply run off instead of leaching into the soil. I use Mirimichi Brand Fertilizers such as Cold Pressed Norwegian Sea Kelp (Nutri-Kelp) and Nutri Tree and Shrub and Release Zero. I have used these products for years with amazing results because they help the soil be healthy and active and perform at the nano-molecular level for immediate uptake by foliage and roots. I also will include Hydretain in my root drench because this product reduces watering needs by as much as 50% for the first three months.
- **Planting Depth:** Make sure the root crown (the area where the roots meet the stem) is level with the soil surface. Planting too deep can lead to poor growth or even rot.
- **Watch for New Growth:** After planting, keep an eye on the plant for any signs of new growth. Bare-root plants can take a while to show above-ground growth, but the root system should begin developing almost immediately.

## Conclusion

Using bare-root plants for your spring or fall gardening projects offers multiple advantages: lower cost, ease of planting, less maintenance, and faster establishment. By following the tips in this guide and utilizing helpful tools like the Stihl powered auger, you can enjoy a smoother, more efficient planting experience that sets your garden up for success. Happy planting!