

## CALU FACTSHEETS – 06/01



### Apple tree planting – December 2006

#### Preparing for planting

Land previously down to grass or where orchards have been grubbed will be ready for planting after a few dry days, particularly if the site was well sub-soiled. However there are some sites that are rather too wet. We cannot emphasise enough that it is better to delay your planting rather than risk poor establishment due to waterlogged soil conditions. So check your soil carefully before you start planting. There is also some evidence that delaying lifting trees from the nursery and planting until well after Christmas can reduce the risk of canker in the new orchard. Remember mistakes made at planting will influence your orchard performance for life so pay attention to detail now.

- Ensure that the site is well drained and sub-soiled and that the pH and nutrient levels are appropriate. Don't plant trees during very wet weather. If your soil is very wet and boggy delay delivery of trees until conditions get better.
- Take care when handling trees, avoid damage to bark and branches as that allows canker to get in.
- When your trees are delivered ensure that they do not desiccate. Heel the trees in and protect them from cold winds and rabbits. Alternatively, enclose the trees in polythene bags or sheets or cover the roots with peat and either store on pallets or in bulk bins in a cold store. Don't store them for long periods, as there is a theory that this can encourage the development of canker.
- Maintain high humidity in your store by regularly spraying water over the store floor. Maintain your store temperature at 2°C for temporary holding. Don't store trees in stores already holding apple and pear fruit or even recently emptied bins (or in stores that were recently emptied and are incompletely vented) as volatile compounds given off by the fruit or bins can damage your trees.

#### Planting

It is vital to get this right, so only take sufficient trees into the orchard for half a day's planting and never let trees dry out. Some growers soak trees for 24 hours in water before planting to ensure that the root system is well wetted. Keep them heeled in or covered with a sheet on the trailer until you need them.

- Don't dig holes in advance, as the soil structure and roots will suffer from waterlogging if it rains. Dig holes and plant at the same time. Use a fork to

break up the sides of the hole and prevent smearing whether you have dug holes by hand or machine.

- There are conflicting theories regarding the benefits of mixing planting compost or fertiliser into the soil used to refill the hole. However, if replant disease is likely then compost and/or fertiliser has often shown benefits provided any compost is incorporated in with the back fill and is not allowed to dry out during the following season. Use a slow release compound fertiliser and mix in the planting hole and backfill. If you use a general compound fertiliser instead you must take great care as damage to the young roots can result relatively easily.
- Firm the soil gently around the tree roots. Do not stamp hard or you will cause compaction, impeded drainage and resultant root loss. Protect trees against rabbits immediately after planting and tie your trees onto the stake immediately to avoid wind-rock and associated waterlogging problems.