

Gardens

hmarsh



An instant tree needs a bit of pampering

TREES take time to grow, but you can give a new planting scheme an instant "lived in" look by buying a semi-mature specimen. But, be prepared, this quick fix does come at a price.

A semi-mature tree, growing in a giant carry cot-style container, is anything from 10ft to 30ft high with a well-formed canopy of

You can cut corners in a new garden by planting semi-mature trees, but they don't come cheap so deserve to be treated with proper respect

branches. Naturally, you can't cram it in the back of your car; it has to be delivered by truck and must be lowered gently into place by a junior crane, but it really looks like a proper tree from day one.

Fair-sized trees are also much in demand as commemorative gifts for such important occasions as the opening of a new village hall or a big family anniversary.

You pay a good bit more than usual, naturally, but you're buying time – a semi-mature tree can save you five, 10 or more years in growing time. They are available in various sizes, with price tags to match. Be prepared to pay several hundred pounds or, in the case of slow-growing trees, several thousand pounds.

You can also buy "instant" hedging by the yard, and fair-sized topiary ready to plant. (Search the internet for semi-mature trees and you'll find dozens of suppliers).

Semi-mature trees can be moved at any time of year if

they've been grown in giant tubs, but autumn is the best time for planting them.

Larger specimens need much more fussing over than the average garden centre-sized tree – and, apart from anything else, when you've paid a lot of money, you'll want to keep it alive.

Most suppliers will do the planting for you when they deliver and will bring with them all the necessary kit, but if you do it yourself, have the planting hole ready before the tree is delivered.

Dig the hole at least twice the size of the rootball, and work in several barrowloads of well-rotted organic matter. Fork two more barrowloads into the topsoil that you've set aside to use for replanting, and mix in a generous dose of polymer gel (similar to that used for retaining moisture in tubs and hanging baskets).

It's also worth using mycorrhizal fungi, which you can sometimes buy dry in sachets specially for tree planting. They

work with the roots to help a new tree establish fast.

When the tree arrives, work out which is its best side, as seen from the house. Gently ease off the container, or carefully cut it away. With root-wrapped trees, grown in a robust netting container, the roots grow through the sides so you can plant the lot intact. Just check that the planting depth is right – the top of the rootball should be an inch or two below the level of the surrounding soil.

STAKE your tree securely; give it a tripod of three stakes or use guy cables to prevent wind-rock for the first couple of years, then water and mulch well.

Better still, put in an irrigation system or sink vertical pipes all round the tree so you can soak water right down to root level – you'll need to keep watering for a couple of years after planting. Well, it's only common sense to protect your investment, but take care not to overwater and turn the earth to mud. The supplier will most certainly offer advice and maybe even a guarantee.

Now that really is worth having.

ening offer Profusion £12.95

£19.90 and save £6

The vivid lilac flowers during summer are delightful, the foliage which turns pink in autumn is beautiful, and the masses of purple fruit in winter are amazing. Callicarpa Profusion likes winter pruning as this encourages bushiness. Birds are attracted to the fruit. Best planted in groups of three, 45cm apart, to produce