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Planting a nut orchard

It has often been said that you plant nut trees for your grandchildren. This is an old myth and probably refers to seedling trees that can take more than 15 years to produce nuts. Modern cultivars usually produce a few nuts in the first or second year after planting and produce a harvestable crop by year six. This sounds exciting but before planting any trees there is work to do in preparing the soil, laying out the tree lines, installing irrigation, and establishing windbreaks.

Soil preparation

Correcting soil problems before planting is relatively easy to do. Correction after planting may be impossible. Where the soil is deep and well-drained, of neutral pH and rich in organic matter, little soil preparation will be required and work before planting may be as simple as cultivation of the tree lines and weed control. However, where drainage is not adequate, soil is shallow or low in organic matter, considerable soil modification is necessary to ensure good tree growth and long-term production. The results of a detailed soil analysis and site survey will determine what orchard preparation work is required before planting. When surveying the site, contour levels and soil types are identified and different soil types are separated into different orchard blocks. This allows management operations such as irrigation and fertilising to be tailored to suit each particular block. Soil analyses by an independent soil laboratory should be undertaken to determine soil depth, whether deep-ripping is necessary and whether drainage is adequate or if soil modification to improve drainage is required. Soil analysis also determines whether the pH is high or low and what amount of organic matter and nutrients should be added to ensure optimum tree health. An analysis of the biological activity in the soil is available through the Soil Foodweb Institute (website <http://www.soilfoodweb.com>).