

Growing Fruit Trees

Site: In selecting a location to grow fruit trees, good light is essential for a good crop of fruit. For best results, plant the tree in a location that receives full sun all day long. Shade from nearby trees or buildings is a major cause of failure in growing a successful crop of fruit. Most fruit tree varieties will tolerate some shade, but too much will mean little or no fruit.

Soil: Fruit trees require good drainage. Do not plant in areas where water is slow to drain away or in places where the soil is constantly wet. Apples, pears, and plums are a little more tolerant of this condition, but no fruit tree can be expected to thrive in a soil that is constantly wet or saturated with water since the roots eventually suffocate from lack of air.

Many home gardens contain heavy clay soils that provide poor drainage. These conditions can be improved through the use of organic materials. Organic material worked thoroughly into the soil improves drainage considerably on most soils. Work soil to a depth of at least 12 inches making certain that the planting hole is free of clay or hard soil at the bottom. This layer is called a "hardpan" and restricts root growth and blocks the penetration of water.

Planting: Dig a hole twice as wide as the soil ball and just as deep. Place the plant in and back fill the hole with 25% compost or organic matter, 75% existing soil. Gently firm/tamp the soil as you fill in the hole. On grafted or budded trees, make certain that the graft "union" is planted just above soil level. Varieties with no "union" should be planted at the same depth at which they were grown.

Planting Distance Between Trees: We recommend spacing trees approximately 10 to 15 feet apart. Sweet cherries grow to a larger size than other fruit trees and should be planted 18 feet apart. True dwarf varieties may be planted 6 to 8 feet apart.

Pruning: When pruning established plantings, it is best to do any pruning while the tree is dormant (before leaves appear) in spring or after they drop in fall and anytime thereafter until spring. Then:

- Cut out broken, dead, or diseased branches (this will encourage new growth).
- Remove twiggy or dense growth in order to allow light to penetrate tree and permit spray materials to reach center branches.
- Eliminate the least desirable of two branches when they touch or are growing close together.
- Remove drooping branches or upright twigs called "Water Sprouts".
- Avoid removing too many branches at one time as this reduces the amount of leaf growth and leaves are vital food manufacturing parts of the tree.

Over-pruning is detrimental to the health and productivity of the tree, so take time to carefully examine the tree to determine how much, if any, pruning is needed. Light pruning and trimming is normally all that is necessary each year if it is done on a regular basis.

Planting (Specific Fruits): For some fruit trees to bear fruit, two or more varieties must be planted side by side to allow for cross-pollination. These varieties must be "compatible" and blooming time must coincide so that flowers on both trees are open in order to be pollinated. Most fruit trees bloom for a period of 7 to 15

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days and the pollination process must be completed during this period. Rain, wind, and cold weather may prevent the flight of insects that carry the pollen from flower to flower making it very important that trees planted for cross-pollinating are placed close enough together to prevent crop failure from such unfavorable conditions. (IMPORTANT: Apple pollen is ineffective on pears, cherry pollen is useless on plums and so on. Only use varieties that are recommended for cross-pollination to ensure best results.)

- **Apple:** Require two different varieties to provide proper cross-pollination. Do not use early blooming varieties to cross-pollinate late blooming varieties. Blooming times must be the same.
- **Apricot:** Requires cross-pollination from another variety.
- **Cherry:** Sour cherries are self-fruitful. Sweet cherries require cross-pollination. (Note: Sweet cherries and sour cherries do not cross-pollinate.)
- **Pear:** All varieties require cross-pollination except for Seckel, which is self-fruitful.
- **Plum:** Santa Rosa is self-fruitful, but produces better yields when cross-pollinated. Others require pollination.
- **Peach:** Self-fruitful, requires no cross-pollination, but planting at least two varieties will make for a better crop.
- **Nectarine:** No cross-pollination is necessary. Nectarines are self-fruitful.

Feeding: Use a well balanced fertilizer recommended especially for fruit trees. Fertilizer should be applied as early in spring as possible. There are many different fertilizers available on the market today for fruit trees. Application rates vary with each type.

Pests: Correct identification of insect and disease problems is important if the right controls are to be used with maximum effectiveness and safety. Consult our qualified personnel or your local county agent if you should experience an insect or disease problem that is unfamiliar to you.

Fungicides: Used to protect plants from diseases caused by various fungi. Some of these diseases are apple scab, brown rot, and powdery mildew.

Insecticides: Offer protection against damage to plants from such insects as apple maggots, codling moths, curculio, and fruit worms.

Combination Sprays: These contain both insecticides and fungicides and help take the guess work out of spray schedules. They provide broad spectrum protection against a host of pests and make spraying convenient for the home gardener by eliminating the need to store and handle more than one product. Never spray trees when they are in bloom as this will seriously affect pollination and result in little or no fruit at harvest time.

CAUTION: Always read directions before using any pesticide. Use only for purposes recommended on the label. Wear protective clothing when using or handling any formulations and keep all pesticides out of the reach of children and pets.

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