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Fruit, Nut, and Berry Selection, Transplanting and Maintenance in North Texas

This guide is written to help you, the homeowner, grow your very own fruit trees and berries from initial transplant stages to maturity and harvest in the Metroplex area of North Texas.

Selecting Your Fruiting Plants

The first thing to do is decide what fruits do you, personally, like enough to eat a LOT of? One or two fruit trees will provide, at maturity, enough fruit in most cases that you're likely to learn how to can, preserve, jar, or dry the fruits of your choice - that, or have a lot of friends who like fresh homegrown fruit! Think about your favorite kinds of fruit, then match them up against the recommended types of fruiting plants for North Texas. Some fruits just aren't well suited for this area, so find something you like to eat that will grow well around here.

The back pages of this guide list some of our most recommended fruit, nut, and berry selections for this area, as selected by our own nursery professionals with guidance from expert fruit tree producers for flavor, vigor, and production in our area. We recommend you work from this list unless you just wish to experiment. These selections work well with our average hours of winter chill time, summer's heat, and soil conditions.

How to Transplant Your New Plant

Select a good, sunny location for your new selection. Plants which provide a large nutmeat, fruit, or otherwise desirable edible portion take a lot of light to make the sugars and starches which make these plants nutritious and tasty. Dig a large planting hole, roughly twice as wide as the original container, but not quite as deep as the original root ball, as we want the tree's root ball to stick slightly up above the surrounding grade (roughly a half-inch is a good height above grade to shoot for - this allows the new plant some room to settle without falling below grade). Make this hole "ugly", meaning that your hole's sides should be roughened and not smoothly cut into the ground, becoming shallower as one gets to the sides of the hole.

Almost all fruit trees and pecans will be grafted trees, which will have a bud union, the place low down on the trunk where the desirable top type of the tree was grafted onto another variety's root-stock. This graft will never be perfectly straight but you'll want it to be reasonably straight and upright without excessive bending or growing off at an odd angle. Make sure that this bud union is visible above ground, as if it's under the soil, the trees planted too deeply and can have serious health problems later!

Rough up the sides of the root ball when you remove the plant from the nursery container, making sure to loosen or cut any encircling roots around the sides of the ball to prevent problems later. Mix one part of our own Covington's Soil Builder with two to three parts of the native soil and use this blended soil to backfill around the root ball. Soil can be added to cover the edges of the root ball which may be sticking up above grade, but add no soil to the top of the original root ball itself, as this needs to remain free of soil. Water the soil thoroughly after installation, and mulch the tree in with a layer of compost or shredded wood mulch. Young fruit trees will not usually require staking, but you can do so if the tree is very top-heavy.

The Most Common Reasons Trees Do Not Fruit

Well established fruit and nut trees will normally produce, but the following causes can prevent proper fruit production:

Age: Many fruit and nut trees need to be at least 3-4 years old (5 for pecans) to produce well, although they'll often have limited production earlier. Older trees (10-20 years or older) usually need strong feeding, and sometimes judicious pruning, to produce well.

Frost: A late frost during your tree's blooming time can damage or destroy a year's crop.

Pruning: Overpruning a fruit tree and removing all the fruit wood can damage a year's crop. If in doubt, leave it alone! Check with one of our nursery professionals if you have questions about pruning your fruit tree, but generally prune to have a more open canopy and to remove damaged or cracked branches only unless a particular form is desired.

Chilling: Each type of fruit or nut tree has a particular number of hours it would like, on average, to chill for during the wintertime. Chilling refers to the number of hours, 45 degrees or under, the tree experiences on average during the dormant period. This number of hours varies from variety to variety and need not be continuous.

Watering: Overwatering can cause premature fruit drop. Lack of deep watering during drought conditions can also cause fruit drop, and drought or overwatering stress during the fall can affect next year's fruit.

Fertilization: Lack of food at critical times can affect your crop.

Requires A Pollinator: Certain fruit trees require a specific other cultivar of the same type of fruit to produce well. Plants on our list will be marked with "requires pollinator" if they need such, otherwise, all plants on our list are self-fertile (do not require a second plant to pollinate and produce).

General Maintenance

Fertilization: Apply root stimulator throughout the first year of the new planting, then apply compost over the root zone of your tree yearly, and fertilize with an even-and-balanced (13-13-13, or 11-15-11 - any fertilizer with roughly a 1-1-1 ratio is fine, the specific fertilizer numbers are less important than the ratio) fertilizer. Our Ferti-lome Fruit Tree Food is an excellent product for this.

Insecticide/Fungicide: Specifics vary, but for most fruit trees and pecans, spray before the tree comes into bloom, after fruit set, and on a 3-4 week average interval thereafter until harvest with our Ferti-lome Fruit Tree spray, a neem-oil based organic product. Don't spray the plant while it's in bloom, as you could interfere with your crop's production.

Watering: Trees installed dormant during the winter need to be well watered in, then watered only if the soil becomes dry to the second knuckle of your index finger during the winter. Water the plant much more once the fruits begin to produce, as they grow, to support proper development of the fruit, but it's better to lose a few fruit to the plant becoming slightly too dry than to have the plant stay soaking wet.

Thinning Fruit: Most fruit trees bloom and produce more young fruit than the tree can possibly ripen to maturity. Peaches and grapes need the most thinning, as peaches (and apricots) should be thinned to one fruit per 5 inches of branch and grape clusters should be heavily thinned (by as much as 70-80%) when the fruits or clusters are around marble-sized for the best quality fruit. Leaving the excess fruit on the tree or vine will not help your overall yield, but will reduce the quality of the crop you receive. Do it. It's worth it. Many other fruit trees would be improved by judicious thinning; if your fruit quality drops during a year (less sugar content), consider thinning the fruit the next season.

Apples

These apples are "semi self-fertile", which means that they will usually produce enough fruit for homeowner use but would bear much more heavily with a proper pollinator. Two different types of apples are normally recommended for serious production, a pollinizer variety and one or more of any other variety.

Red Delicious: Large fruit, red waxy skin, pure white flesh. Bears more heavily when pollinized with Yellow Delicious. Ripens: September-October.

Yellow Delicious: Large fruit, golden yellow. Excellent pollinizer variety. Ripens: September-October.

Granny Smith: Large fruit, bright green skin which remains bright green for quite a while after harvest. Ripens: August-September.

Apricots

The apricot listed is self-fertile. Thin the developing fruit of an apricot to one per 4-5 inches of branch for the best quality of fruit.

Moorpark: Large, brownish-red skin, orange flesh. Ripens: late June to early July, harvest through July.

Blackberries

Blackberries are self-fertile. Allow blackberry canes to develop strong canes (pruning the canes at 3-4' tall to encourage strong stems) the first year after planting. Blackberries only produce upon wood which was grown the preceding year, so the second year, when your blackberries begin to fruit, remove the canes which had fruit completely (just above the ground) right after you harvest the berries in the early summer. Blackberries appreciate a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer right when they begin growing in the spring, and right after you harvest and prune the plant.

Recommended Types: Brazos, Navaho. Navaho is thornless. Both are tart, and upright.

Citrus

Citrus fruits are a special case, as they can not be planted outside in North Texas and survive our winter. All types of citrus are happy in our spring, summer, and fall, and can bear even in containers. Fertilize these trees with an even-and-balanced fertilizer with micronutrients (especially iron, and magnesium) for the best success, and make sure they keep even levels of soil moisture to prevent fruit drop, but you must have a well-lit area that doesn't drop below 38-40 degrees for the best success during the winter.

Figs

Figs bear constantly through the summer and into the early fall. All listed types are fully self-fertile. Fertilize mostly with a layer of compost or manure, as excessive fertilizer can cause surge leaf and stem growth at the expense of production. Spray figs just as the leaves mature and after heavy rain events (multiple days of heavy rain) to keep the leaves healthy with our Ferti-lome Fruit Tree spray (organic) or a copper fungicide. Birds love to peck at ripening figs, so a bird net is recommended as the first figs begin to ripen to keep the pests away from your fruit. Small-eye or closed-eye fig varieties (referring to the opening at the bottom of the fig, certain insect pests like to crawl into large-eye types and infect the fruit with a bacterium, causing the fruit to sour) are most recommended.

Brown Turkey: Medium to large sized, brown to violet colored fruit with strawberry colored flesh. Small-eye variety.

Celeste: Small to medium sized, light brown fig with pink flesh and a tightly closed eye. One of the best tasting varieties, more prone to freeze damage to a season's crop, produces best off the previous year's wood.

Texas Everbearing: Medium to large, bell-shaped fig, brownish-yellow skin, amber flesh. Bears young, tolerates colder areas.

Grapes

Prune grapes sharply for the best production. The pruning techniques are different for each type of grape listed here, they're described.

Flame: nearly-seedless red, color may fade in hot summers but fruit quality does not, medium table grape. Leave long canes on this grape to train along wires or trellises, as it develops the best fruitwood away from the main cane. Ripens: late July.

Seibel 9110: large white-yellow fruit in large clusters. Wine or table variety. Prune back to within several buds of the main canes to leave small spurs for the development of new wood. Ripens: August to September.

Peaches

All listed types are self-fertile. Peaches do very well in North Texas. Thin developing fruit at marble-size to one per 5 inches of branch for best quality of fruit. Peaches will usually set far too many fruit for quality production, thin aggressively. Peaches are divided into "cling" (fruit sticks onto the pit) and "freestone" (fruit breaks cleanly off the pit) varieties. Cling peaches are best for canning, preserves, and cooking. Freestones make the best fresh-fruit eating peaches.

Golden Glory (Dwarf cultivar): Very large fruit, gold skin with light red blush, yellow flesh. Freestone. The smallest growing peach tree available (5' tall at maturity). Good for smaller locations. Ripens: August.

Elberta: Large, elongated fruit. Golden yellow skin, flushed with red where exposed to sun. Yellow flesh, freestone.

Harvester: Medium to large fruit, bright red skin evenly blushed over yellow. Acidic, yellow flesh. Ripens uniformly instead of staggered ripening. Freestone. Ripens: late June.

Loring: Large, yellow skin with red blush, yellow flesh. Freestone. Ripens: mid-July.

Ranger: Large, brightly colored red skin, yellow flesh. Late blooming, good for colder areas, heavy producer. Freestone. Ripens: early July.

Redskin: Large, deep red skin over yellow. Yellow flesh, good for eating or canning. Freestone. Ripens: early August.

Sentinel: Medium to large fruit, yellow skin with red blush. One of the sweetest peaches, semi-freestone. Ripens: mid-June.

Pears

The following pears do well in this area, and are semi self-fertile unless noted (sufficient production for homeowner use, better with a pollinizer).

Kieffer: Fully self-fertile, greenish yellow skin blushed red, stores well, coarse texture (high stone cell count). Ripens: October to November.

Moonglow: Large, brownish-green skin, soft flesh, juicy, low grit. Mild flavor, better production with pollinizer. Ripens: early August.

Orient: Large, round, yellow skin. Smooth texture, better production with pollinizer.

Pecans

All pecan varieties do better with a pollinator, but some are more self-fertile than others. Plant an early pollen shedder with a late pollen shedding type for the best nut set. Pecans need to be fed a high-nitrogen or all-nitrogen fertilizer and are best quality when the leaves are sprayed with a zinc foliar-feed.

Cheyenne: early shedder, soft-shell medium-sized pecan, excellent flavor, early producing. Good pollinator for other varieties. Ripens: late Sept-early October.

Choctaw: late shedder, very large nutmeat, soft shell, good quality. Early bearing, semi self-fertile. Ripens: late Oct-early November.

Desirable: early shedder, large, medium-soft shell. Semi self-fertile. Ripens: late Oct-early November.

Pawnee: early shedder, soft shell, early ripening - ripens late September.

Persimmons

All persimmons listed here are fully self-fertile.

Fuyu Giant: Orange skin, non-astringent flavor, round to semi-oblong and large. Bears from an early age, no seeds unless planted with other varieties. Ripens: November.

Tanenashi: Medium size, cone-shaped fruit, orange skin, seedless, astringent. Bears from an early age. Ripens: October.

Plums

Some of the plums listed here are self-fertile and some require a pollinizer to produce (at all). Plums are good producers in North Texas; they're well worth your time.

Methley: Medium to large fruit, purple skin, amber-red flesh. Fully self-fertile. Ripens: early June.

Morris: requires pollinizer, large, round, deep-red skin, bright red flesh. Outstanding flavor. Excellent disease resistance. Ripens: mid-June.

Santa Rosa: Large, oval plums, purplish-red skin with blue highlights, yellow flesh to dark red near the skin. Self-fertile. Ripens: mid-June.

Pomegranates

Pomegranates are useful for their beauty as well as their fruit. They have beautiful orange-red flowers, they're drought tolerant, tolerate our soil extremely well and can freeze to the roots at 0 degrees and recover. Plus, they're tasty!

Wonderful: Extra-large fruit, red skin, red flesh, the most commercially available pomegranate. Ripens: September.