



Pest Corner

February, 2006

Selecting Fruit Trees

Now is the time when most local nurseries and garden stores have an excellent supply of bare root fruit trees in stock and ready for planting. Deciding which ones to plant will depend on what will grow in our coastal climate, the amount of room you have to develop an orchard and whether additional trees are needed for pollination purposes.

The WSU publication "Tree Fruit Varieties for Western Washington," (EB 0937) included in the orchard section of your Sustainable Gardening training manual provides a wealth of excellent information for the home orchard enthusiast. It contains information on suggested varieties of apples, pears, plums and cherries for our coastal climate. Included are pollination charts, and individual varietal descriptions that are detailed to point of making you want one of each. There are also several excellent websites that make for good reading even if you're not considering planting fruit trees:

http://mtvernon.wsu.edu/frt_hort/altcrop.htm gives a number of alternative fruit trees like Aronia and Sea Buckthorn that you might never have considered.

<http://www.uga.edu/fruit/> provides outstanding information on a very large number of fruit crops. It's a fun read.

Whatever you choose to grow may also depend upon how much patience you have. Fruit trees normally will begin to bear fruit soon after they have become old enough to blossom freely. Nevertheless, the health of your tree and its environment, its fruiting habits, and the cultural practices you use, can influence its ability to produce fruit. Adequate pollination is also essential to fruit yield. If just one of these conditions is unfavorable, yields may be reduced or eliminated.

When you purchase nursery-grown fruit trees, their tops will probably be from 1 to 2 years old. The length of time from planting to fruit bearing varies with the type of fruit. Trees that grow at a moderate rate generally bear fruit sooner than those that grow either too quickly or too slowly.

The age from when fruit trees can be expected to bear fruit after you plant them follows:

Variety	Time In Years To Bear Fruit
Apple	2 to 5
Apricot	2 to 5
Cherry, sour	3 to 5
Cherry, sweet	4 to 7
Citrus	3 to 5
Fig	2 to 3
Peach	2 to 4
Pear	4 to 6
Plum	3 to 6
Quince	5 to 6

Dwarf apple and dwarf pear trees usually begin to bear 1 to 2 years earlier than standard sized trees.

Most fruit trees need to be pollinated. Without sufficient pollination, they may blossom abundantly, but will not bear fruit.

Apples: Plant at least two varieties of apple trees near one another. Golden Delicious, a self fruitful type, is one of the few exceptions to this rule. Poor pollen-producing types, such as Baldwin, Gravenstein, Staymen and Winesap need to be planted with at least two other varieties to insure adequate pollination.

Cherries: Bing, Lambert, and Royal Ann cherry trees do not pollinate one another. Plant a pollinating variety such as Black Tartarian, Republican, Van or Windsor, or a sour cherry such as Montmorency nearby.

Pears: Most varieties of pears are completely or partially self unfruitful. For adequate pollination, plant at least two varieties together. Bartlett and Seckel pears will not pollinate each other and Magness cannot be used as a pollinator.

Plums: Since most varieties of Japanese and American plums are self unfruitful, plant two or more varieties together.

Planting Bare-root Trees

Fruit trees usually are sold bareroot, so place the roots over a low mound of soil in the hole. It's very important to plant a fruit or nut tree at the right level. Try to plant the tree at the same level that it was growing in the nursery. (Look closely and you can see a slight change in color marking the root crown line.) Make sure the graft union is above ground; if it is not, the rootstock will produce shoots that may overpower the grafted or budded stock. The scion (grafted variety) also may produce roots that lessen the effect of the rootstock.

Pest Corner is the title of a series of gardening articles which appears in the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties Master Gardener Newsletter.