

Choosing the perfect fruit for your home garden

What to consider.

What to avoid.

Growing your own fruit is a rewarding experience. The more research you do, the happier you will be with the result.

Growing fruit, like any plant, requires an awareness of its needs. What is also important, and may not be obvious at first, is considering your available time, interests and abilities. Getting the most benefit from fruit you grow involves several factors beyond soil, sunshine and temperature. Here are some points to ponder.

1

What do you like to eat? How easy is it to buy this fruit at the grocery store?

Even the simplest fruit requires effort to pick. Make sure that this effort is worth it by choosing something that's costly to purchase, or a variety not seen in your local store. Raspberries are a good example of this being expensive and prone to spoiling. If you enjoy apples, why not try a variety like Strawberry Pippin apple that is not seen outside of farmer's markets?

There's several specialty nurseries that offer less common fruits and even nuts that can be grown at home. The issue with choosing an uncommon variety is, you probably don't know how it tastes. How can you commit to something you've never tried? See



if the nursery offers tasting what they grow. Grimo Nut Nursery in Niagara sells nuts from the trees they grow (www.grimonut.com). Silver Creek Nursery, outside of Waterloo, holds an annual fruit tasting open house (www.silvercreeknursery.ca/pages/events). It's also important to check if the variety is uncommon because it's difficult to grow. Alternatively, just because a fruit is common in stores does not mean it is easy to care for. Honeycrisp apples are challenging, even for the pros. Other reasons a fruit is not commercially grown may have to do with its being too delicate to withstand transportation, i.e., its skin or rind is too thin, it spoils too quickly once picked or it does not produce enough fruit to make it commercially viable. Reasons like these are not a problem for the home grower.

2

How easy is the fruit to pick? Can you reach it without a ladder? Does the plant have spines or thorns? Do you have the patience to spend the time necessary for a useful harvest?

At the Whitby Ajax Garden Project (WAGP), we concentrate on fruit that doesn't need a ladder to pick – grapes, currants, raspberries, blackberries and gooseberries. You can try your hand at fruit picking to see if it suits you. WAGP welcomes volunteers.

3



Does it require spraying?

WAGP has a really nice apple tree, but without someone willing to volunteer the time and expertise for spraying, the apples are not fit for donation. Some fruit trees, such as cherry and pear, do not require annual spraying.

4

How much pruning does it require?



Of the fruits we grow, grapes and raspberries require the most pruning, done at the end of the growing season. Newly planted fruit trees will require pruning for their first three years, to ensure strong branches and an open growth habit. Once that is done, light pruning is typically all that is needed to remove downward weak branches, waterspouts and damaged wood.

5



How much space do you have? What kind of conditions are available?

Do you have room for two trees? How about two dwarf trees? The production of some fruits such as pears, sweet cherries, plums and apples, require two different varieties to be grown. In this case, the pollen of one variety cannot fertilize its own flowers; so another compatible variety needs to be cultivated nearby. In the case of sweet cherries however, there are a couple of varieties that are self-fertile, such as Stella.

Continued

Do you only have room for one tree? Nearly all peaches, nectarines, sour cherries and apricots are self-fertile and will produce fruit with one tree. Do you have a white flowered crabapple tree nearby? If you do, it can fertilize most apple varieties and your new apple tree will produce fruit.

Does the available planting space have full sun, which is necessary for most fruit? There are some that can tolerate partial shade and still produce fruit – pears, sour cherries, blackberries, raspberries and currants. Do you have space for a planter in full sun conditions? Strawberries, saskatoon berries, blackberries, raspberries and currants will readily grow in containers. Blueberries, because their need for acidic soil makes them a challenge to grow, are well suited to containers. Do you have access to an insulated shed or unheated garage? If so, you'll be able to grow your own figs; growing them outdoors in late spring through to fall and overwintering them indoors keeping them safe from frost.

Getting started

Make a list of possible fruits you'd like to grow. There's a fruit that can be grown in almost any situation. Don't have a lot of sunshine? Try raspberries. Don't want to climb a ladder? Grow dwarf varieties. Don't want to have to spray? Cherries don't require regular spraying. Find all of this intimidating? Try something small at first like strawberries, raspberries or blackberries. The start-up cost will be lower and there's nothing like the taste of your own home-grown fresh fruit to encourage you to try other things.

There's lots to be gained from growing your own fruit. Your nutritional health will benefit from having a handy source. Being outdoors and taking care of your plants will also benefit your mental and physical health. You'll know exactly how your fruit was grown and what chemicals were used (or avoided). You'll also be providing habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife, as well as reducing your carbon footprint.

Best wishes on your fruit growing journey. Let us know how it goes! Here's more resources about fruit growing:

Fruit tree nursery near Guelph - Whiffletree Farm & Nursery: Canadian Apple Fruit Trees & Orchard Supply
www.whiffletreefarmandnursery.ca

The 5 Best Fruit Trees | Eising Garden Centre
www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-choose-fruit-plants-for-your-home-garden#3-tips-for-growing-fruit-in-your-garden

www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/fruit_home.htm

Educational website
www.orchardpeople.com

Apple spraying: Home Apple Tree Care & Spray Guide for Beginners - Tuttle Orchards Inc: Indianapolis Apple Orchard, Pumpkin Patch and Farm Store.
www.indianapolisorchard.com

Dig Bits

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