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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 you like enough to eat a LOT of. One or two mature fruit trees will provide 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 to 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. 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 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; if it's under the soil, the tree is 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

will 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. Check with one of our nursery experts if you have questions about pruning your fruit tree. 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 winter. 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 Bonide 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, apricots and grapes need the most thinning. Thin peaches and apricots to one fruit per 5 inches of branch; grape clusters should be 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 won't help overall yield, but will reduce the quality of the crop. 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), thin the fruit the next season.

Plant Selections for North Texas

Note: Our recommendations and selections will change from time to time, as we regularly check with the Extension Service for their newest recommendations for our area. This doesn't mean a variety we recommended years ago, and don't anymore, is poor; only that a better selection and more testing over time may have proved another variety superior for North Texas.

Apples

The following apples are "semi self-fertile", meaning 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.

Anna: Large, light greenish-yellow skin, slightly tart, a good fresh fruit apple. Produces early, more self-fertile than other apples. Great for warm-winter climates. *Ripens: Early July*

Urban Apple series (4 types): Extremely narrow, upright trees, perfect for limited space growing, mature growth of 10'T x 2'W (not a misprint, two feet!). All four apples in the series can cross pollinate each other. 'Tasty Red' - bright red and sweet; 'Blushing Delight' - greenish with a blush of red, sweet; 'Golden Treat' - green-gold apples which are tart early and sweeter the longer they stay on the tree; and 'Tangy Green', a solidly green, tart apple with a crisp flavor.

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.

Mollie's Delicious: Very large, yellow skin w/ red blush. Pollinate w/Granny Smith. Ripens: Late July- August.

Gala: Golden yellow skin with reddish orange blush, a crisp snacking apple. Heat tolerant, ripens Aug-Sept., pollinate with Fuji or Red Delicious.

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

Fuji: Medium reddish-green skin, white flesh, good eating apple. Ripens: Mid-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 berries in early summer. Feed blackberries with a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer when they begin growing in the spring, and right after you harvest and prune the plant.

Recommended Types: Brazos, Navaho, Ouachita, Apache, Arapaho. All these except Brazos are thornless.

Blueberries

Blueberries need a strongly acid soil, so grow them in large containers or in above-ground planter boxes rather than in-ground. Add soil acidifier each time you feed them. Keep the plants well mulched to tolerate our heat. Build the soil in your container or raised bed with a mixture of Canadian peat moss and a small amount of pine bark. Most blueberries require another variety for pollination; 'Tifblue' is a notable exception. Harvest blueberries every 3-5 days during the productive season, as they will not all be ready at once and they're bitter if picked early. All varieties produce more with two or more types planted near each other for cross-pollination.

Climax: Our earliest variety, harvest begins in mid-June.

Jubilee: A good performer even in areas without excellent soil amendment. Light blue berry color. Ripens in late June-early July.

Premier: A large-fruited blueberry, can produce without a pollinator but much better production with one. Ripens in late June.

Tifblue: Our best self-fruitful variety, Tifblue has the best self-pollination of any blueberry usable in our area. Ripens in early July.

Citrus

Citrus fruits are a special case, as they cannot 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 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 with our Ferti-lome Fruit Tree spray (organic) or a copper fungicide, just as the leaves mature and after multiple days of heavy rain, to keep the leaves healthy. 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 fruit. Small-eye or closed-eye varieties (referring to the opening at the bottom of the fig), are most recommended. Certain insects like to crawl into large-eye types and infect the fruit with a bacterium, causing the fruit to sour.

Brown Turkey: Medium-large size, brown-violet colored fruit w/strawberry colored flesh. Small-eye variety.

Black Jack: Large, long, purple fruit with strawberry red flesh. Natural semi-dwarf, easily maintained at 6-8' tall.

Blue Giant (Texas Blue Giant): Large fruit, purple skin, amber flesh.

Celeste: Small to medium sized, light brown fig with pink flesh and a tightly closed eye. One of the best tasting varieties, produces best off the previous year's wood. Proven to have excellent cold resistance.

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.

Black Spanish: A red wine, juice, and jelly variety which has produced very high yields in South Texas since 1889. The cluster is large and compact with small, black, seeded grapes. The juice is very different in that it is very red rather than clear in color. (**Cane prune**). The fruit ripens in late July or early August.

Champanel: A jelly variety. The cluster is small with large, black, seeded berries which are very acidic until fully ripe. The vine is extremely vigorous and grows well in a wide range of soils. Unusually high disease resistance to all common grape diseases. (**Spur prune**). Ripens July-August.

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. (**Cane prune**) Ripens: late July.

Perlette: large white grape, seedless variety. (**Cane prune**) Ripens: Mid-July.

Summer Royal: medium-sized black seedless grape. (**Cane prune**) Table variety. Ripens: August.

New Varieties of Nectarines & Peaches from Texas A&M

The following delicious new nectarines and peaches were developed specifically for Texas gardeners and they ripen earlier than most. Our other varieties are tried and true, but these new low-chill types really produce, and many are low acid making them sweeter than normal.

Nectarines

Smooth Texan Two: A tangy-sweet nectarine that ripens in late-May.

Smooth Texan Three: A low acid nectarine that ripens in early June.

Smooth Delight Two: A low acid, yellow flesh nectarine that ripens in mid-May.

Smooth Zest One: Red skinned, white melting flesh cling nectarine. Ripens mid-May. Superior flavor, early crop time.

Smooth Zest Two: An acidic, yellow flesh nectarine that ripens in early to mid-May.

Peaches

Flat Delight One: A white flesh, low acid, doughnut-shaped peach that ripens in mid-May.

Flat Delight Two: A yellow flesh, very sweet and low acid, doughnut shaped peach that ripens in late May.

White Delight Series (One, Two, Three, Four): A series of white, melting flesh, low acid peaches with similar characteristics that ripen on a schedule! Late May, mid-June, late June, and early July respectively.

Royal Zest Four: A yellow firm flesh, semi-freestone peach, tangy and sweet peach that ripens in mid-June.

White Zest One: A semi-freestone, tangy-sweet peach that ripens in mid-June.

TexPrince: A tangy-sweet, yellow flesh, freestone peach that ripens in late May.

TexKing: A yellow flesh, clingstone, tangy-sweet peach that ripens in mid-to late May.

Tropic Zest Four: A yellow flesh, tangy-sweet peach that ripens in early June.

TexFirst: A yellow flesh peach that ripens late April to early May.

Texstar: A yellow flesh, flat fruit that ripens in late May.

Tried and True Nectarines

Flavortop: Large freestone fruit has firm yellow flesh and a very red skin. Self-fertile. Ripens mid-July.

Surecrop: A self-fertile plant, Surecrop is a freestone nectarine with red-blushed skin. Ripens in late June.

Tried and True Peaches

All listed types are self-fertile. Peaches do very well in North Texas. Thin the 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.

Belle of Georgia: Medium sized, white-fleshed fruit. Freestone. Ripens: mid-July.

Elberta: Large, elongated fruit. Gold/yellow skin flushed with red when exposed to sun. Yellow flesh. Freestone.

Florida King: Medium, semi-cling fruit. One of the earliest season peaches around. Ripens: mid-May.

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.

June Gold: Large, firm, yellow-fleshed fruit is red-skinned and freestone when fully ripe. Ripens early 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, red skin over yellow. Yellow flesh, good for eating/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. Some pears are semi-self fertile (enough for homeowner use, not ideal for production growth), and others require a pollinator for production.

Ayers: Yellow fruit with red blush, semi-self fertile. Ripens: August.

Bartlett: The #1 pear in the world for a reason, large, smooth, yellow skin with white flesh. Vigorous grower, self-fertile but better production with a pollinator. Pollinates other pear types well.

Hosui: Asian pear, mid-to-large fruit, crisp like an apple. Golden skin with russet overtones. Ripens: August.

Kieffer: One of the best self-pollinating pears, 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. Best with Bartlett as a pollinator. Ripens: early August.

Orient: Large, round, yellow skin. Smooth texture, better production with pollinizer, either Bartlett or Kieffer.

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.

Hachiya: Oblong, midsize fruit, skin glossy, deep orange-red; flesh dark-yellow with occasional black streaks, astringent until fully ripe and soft, then sweet and rich. Mostly seedless. Ripens: late October-November.

Tamopan: Squarish, large fruit, thick, orange-red skin, flesh light-orange, usually astringent until fully ripe, then sweet and rich. Seedless or nearly so. Very vigorous. Ripens: October.

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.

Bruce: Large fruit, red skin and flesh, early ripening variety. Needs a pollinizer like Methley. One of the largest fruiting plums in the area. Ripens: mid-late May.

Methley: Medium 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.

Raspberries

Everbearing raspberries have an unusual fruiting cycle, putting on fruit twice during the year - once on last year's canes on the lower portion of the cane, and later in the season on the new year's cane growth near the top of the cane. The largest fruit is found on the upper part of the new season's growth. Raspberries need an excellent coat of mulch and a good amount of moisture to help them stand up to our heat. Prune off canes which have produced near the ground to remove them after harvest, as those canes will not fruit again.

Heritage Red: A large-fruited everbearing red raspberry, moderate early July crop and heavy production of September fruit. Has solid canes that do not need staking (most raspberries do).

Nova: Very hardy plant with fewer thorns. Medium size, firm, bright red berries with good, slightly tart flavor.

Some Lesser Known, Interesting Fruit and Nut Trees/Vines for North Texas

There are a number of interesting edible plants that are either a little challenging for us to grow, very new, or are traditional plants that have fallen out of the common usage. It's fun to try new things and to grow enough of these to share with friends and family.

Avocado (Mexican cold hardy types) - These plants will tolerate temperatures in the 18-20° range, so they're as cold tolerant an avocado as is possible. Plant avocado in a sunny location protected from the north and northwest wind; mulch deeply for winter, and it's best to cover the plant with frost cloth for severe ices. Evergreen plant, blooms between January and March, harvest mature fruit six months later. A real conversation piece - we'll never plant whole avocado orchards in our area, but it's not difficult to maintain one or two. Productive after two to four years. Make sure you purchase a cold hardy variety only; other avocado plants will not tolerate our winter at all.

Black Walnut: An excellent Texas native, large tasty nutmeat, grows to be an enormous tree! Very drought tolerant, ripens Sept.-Oct. Black walnuts drop a golf-ball sized drupe, harvest and shuck walnuts while wearing gloves, as the husks are staining. Do not plant around sensitive species of shrubs such as azaleas, as this tree emits a chemical that will injure them.

Goji berries - Also called wolfberry, this deciduous shrubby vine makes a small orange-red fruit the size of a raisin, which is very rich in vitamin A, C, iron, dietary fiber and antioxidants. Hardy throughout most of Texas' climate zones, it's very new to Texas gardeners, but there seems to be no bar to them being an easy, productive crop in our area and it likes alkaline soil in climate zones 5-9. Keep moderately moist in the summer for the best production. Tip back in February to control the size; otherwise they'll get six to eight feet tall and wide. Productive the second year onward.

Paw Paw - A fruit native to North America that does well in our climate. They bear 5 oz. to 1 pound fruit that tastes much like bananas. The fruit is best used at room temperature, fresh or in cold recipes as cooking heat will destroy their flavor. Ripe when the fruit softens (may develop brownish streaks on the outer part much as bananas do while ripening). Paw paws are a host plant for zebra swallowtails; they feed on the foliage (rarely doing much damage, we'd recommend leaving them alone) as caterpillars and turn into beautiful butterflies afterwards. Keep the young plant moist or lightly shaded until established.

Satsuma Orange 'Orange Frost' - Newly released in 2013, this is a true zone 8 citrus according to the Extension service! Small but sweet oranges on a plant that is more tolerant of North Texas winters. Mulch this plant deeply and give it some protection from north wind, and protect much as you would a palm - wrapping for severe ice storms and extended subfreezing weather the first couple of years. The most cold tolerant Satsuma orange release to date, and it's made the Texas Superstar list for a reason. Will come true from the root and base even if it freezes back in our worst weather. We've always used citrus in containers before, and this is the first one that we've seen with a good shot of being productive in ground. (Fun to try something new!)

Pluot 'Spring Satin' - A cross between a plum and an apricot, this pluot is a self-fertile freestone fruit well suited to the chilling hours of our area. 2" fruit with red-black skin and sweet yellow-red flesh. Plums and apricots are both easy to grow, and their cross is interesting.