



EASY TO GROW FRUITS

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If you're new to gardening and worried that your first effort to grow fruit will turn out to be a fruitless venture, then the best place to begin is with picking out some easy to grow types of fruits to start with. Easy to grow fruits are usually more forgiving to soil types, more disease free and better able to adapt to busy gardeners with little time to water. This does not mean that you can just dig a hole and drop the plant in. The gardener that spends the time choosing a good site with lots of sun, enriching the soil and paying attention to watering the plant when needed is the one that gets the most out of the tree and the best harvest. But easy to grow trees really means you'll spend little or no time spraying for fungus and bugs. These types of fruits are also good choices for people that want to grow their fruit organically. Let's check out the possibilities.

BERRIES

Blackberry, blueberry and boysenberry take up little room and can even be grown in containers. They are the easiest fruits to get started with, but if you've got your heart set on blueberries, make sure your soil is acidic enough, heavy clay soils can be problematic so test your soil to insure your success.

BIG SHADE TREES

Chestnut, black walnut, pecan and mulberry are great choices if you've got the room and would like a cool edible place to hang out in. Chestnuts and pecans need cross pollination to set fruit so you'll need two trees. Be sure you get the right varieties that pollinate each other.

TRIED AND TRUE

Persimmon, pears and figs were the main stay of the old southern homestead. These fruits are so easy to grow and long lived. Make sure you pick pears that are well suited to our area, many are not and that you get two different varieties for cross pollination and good fruit set.

EXOTIC BUT EASY TO GROW

Loquats, olives, pineapple guava, jujuba, pomegranate and quince; yes you can grow all of these! In fact they are some of the easiest fruits to grow. Pineapple guava, loquat and olives make wonderful evergreen

hedges and screens. Jujuba are almost date like when dried. All but the pineapple guava fruit well without a pollinator.

CITRUS

Citrus is an easy plant to grow in our area, be sure to choose one of the more cold tolerant types like Satsuma tangerines, Changsha tangerines, kumquats or Meyer lemon. These all are much more successful if grafted on Trifoliolate rootstock.

LOW CARE VINES

Muscadine grapes and kiwis are excellent for covering an old fence or bordering a vegetable garden with. Choose the right variety of kiwi and make sure it's a named variety for your area. You will need a male kiwi to pollinate your females to insure fruit.

NEAR WILD FRUITS

If you want to be a true locavore, you should look into growing some of the fruits that are native to our area. Elderberry, Chickasaw plum, muscadine grapes, and paw paws all have good quality fruit and well worth adding to your orchard, edible landscape or urban food plot.

After you've settled on what type of fruit you'll want to grow, look into a couple of other things that will make your new fruit growing venture highly successful. First choose a variety that is well suited to your area. Here in North Florida and South Georgia we have very short winters compared to more northern climates. Most fruit trees require a winter dormancy period and to be successful you'll have to find a variety that is suited to fruit well in our climate. Look for varieties that require 500 to 600 hours of winter chill. To read more about chill requirement and good varieties for your area check out this IFAS online document "Deciduous Fruits for North Florida" at <http://dixie.ifas.ufl.edu/pdfs/gardening/deciduous.pdf>

Another important consideration is making sure your fruit tree is on the right rootstock. Many fruits like citrus, persimmon and pears are grafted. Rootstock plays the part of insuring your tree can withstand the soil diseases in our area, controls the size of the tree and in the case of citrus makes it more cold tolerant. It's always best to ask your nursery person what rootstock your tree is grown on and why.

A big factor of planting fruit trees is where to locate them in your yard. Limited space can lead to creative alternatives like edible landscaping. Just as with ornamentals, edible landscaping starts by thinking about the size and shape of the plant, its light requirements and the color and timing of the blooms. From there you can let your imagination run free. Start thinking about fruit trees as specimen plants in your beds, as you would use a crepe myrtle or a dogwood. Apples and pears are stunning when in bloom, with clouds of pink and white in early spring, as well as being extremely colorful when loaded with fruit. Persimmon trees are the show pieces of the fall garden; their brilliant bright orange fruit hang like Christmas ornaments on the tree well past leaf drop. If you're a fan of fall foliage, persimmon trees are outstanding; cherry pink, burnt orange and clear yellow. Use your low growing vegetables and herbs in a free-form mass under the trees as ground cover, combining the colors and textures. Think of creepers and spillers like oregano, thyme and strawberries to soften pathway edges. Grapes, kiwi, tomatoes, cucumbers and peas work well on arbors and fences. Hedges are another great place for edibles; include some pineapple guava or kumquats for a colorful evergreen show.

With the careful selection and a little research on the basics of growing fruit trees it's easy to grow your own fruit trees and enjoy the home ripe sweetness of your own fruit.