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THE HOME TREE FRUIT PLANTING

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A few fruit trees in the home garden may provide delicious fruit to give variety to your menu. They may also be used as attractive features in the landscape.

Most home gardeners have room for only a few trees so these must be selected with care. You must consider their ultimate size, their susceptibility to disease and insect problems, and the need for pollination. Dwarf trees start bearing earlier than standard size trees, and are easier to prune and spray.

Pears

Pears are probably the best tree fruit for the home planting if you select varieties which are resistant to fire blight. Pears are not troubled seriously by other diseases or insects, and can be grown with very little spraying.

Moonglow, Magness, and Seckel pears are resistant to fire blight, and are recommended for the home garden. At least 2 varieties must be planted to ensure pollination and fruit set.

Apples

Apples are more susceptible to insect and disease problems than pears, and will require more spraying to secure high quality fruit. Early maturing varieties such as Lodi, Summer Rambo, and Grimes Golden usually are attacked less by insects and diseases than varieties which ripen later. Golden Delicious is a good mid-season variety. Plant at least 2 varieties to ensure effective pollination.

Cherries

The sour cherry is a good fruit for the home garden. The trees are relatively small and insects and diseases usually are not a serious problem.

Montmorency is the best sour cherry variety. It pollinates itself so it can be planted alone. It requires very little pruning and will produce good crops with little care. Bird damage to the ripening fruit may be a serious problem.

Sweet cherry trees are not recommended for the home planting because they are difficult to establish unless a very deep, well drained soil is available. Also, they are quite susceptible to damage by insects and diseases.

Peaches, Nectarines and Plums

Peaches, nectarines, and plums require more spraying to control insects and diseases than the other fruits discussed here. Therefore, unless you are willing to spray them quite regularly during the summer, they should not be included in the home fruit planting.

Age of Bearing and Yield of Tree Fruits

	Age when bearing starts: years	Yield per mature tree: bushels		Age when bearing starts: years	Yield per mature tree: bushels
Apple-dwarf	3	1	Cherry-sour	4	2
Apple-semi-dwarf	5	4	Cherry-sweet	6	2
Apple-standard	7	8	Peach	3	4
Pear-dwarf	3	1	Nectarine	3	4
Pear-standard	5	3	Plum	4	2

### Starting the Home Tree Fruit Planting

Fruit trees need a deep, well drained, fertile soil. The site must be elevated above the surrounding area to ensure good air drainage, and reduce the possibility of damage by frost during the blooming season.

Vigorous one-year-old trees should be selected. Older trees are more difficult to transplant, and are not as easy to train to a desired form.

The best time to plant fruit trees is in the early spring about a month before the average date of the last frost in your area. The trees should be dormant.

Dig a large hole to allow the roots to be extended to their full length. Place the tree at about the same depth as it was in the nursery. Fill around the roots with fertile topsoil. Apply water to settle the soil as the hole is filled. Scatter a cupful of 5-10-10 fertilizer around the tree, and apply a 2 inch mulch of sawdust, bark or wood chips to conserve soil moisture.

### Cultural Practices & Fertilization

Fruit trees should be cultivated or mulched for several years when young to eliminate competition from weeds or grass. After they become well established the mulching can be continued, or they may be grown with lawn around them, which should be mowed weekly. If in a lawn area, it is advisable to maintain a mulch for 2 or 3 foot around the trunk to reduce competition with the grass, and make mowing easier.

Fruit trees need to be fertilized each spring just before growth starts. Apply about one cup of 10-10-10 fertilizer, or two cups of 5-10-5 per tree per year of age. Broadcast the fertilizer evenly over the root zone around the tree, extending about 2 feet beyond the end of the branches.

### Pruning

Fruit trees must be pruned regularly to develop strong framework branches to support the crop. The pruning should be done each year in early spring just before growth starts.

During the first few years after planting, select several main scaffold branches on the trunk. Select branches with wide angles which will be strong. Remove branches with narrow crotch angles which will be weak. If possible, leave at least 6 inches vertical distance between adjacent branches, and have them evenly spaced around the trunk.

As the tree approaches bearing age, remove any damaged branches, and those with narrow crotch angles. Head the long branches back to strong laterals to maintain a convenient height. The tree must be thinned out so that light may penetrate to the leaves and fruit, and to allow thorough spraying to control insects and diseases.

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For more detailed information on varieties, cultural practices, pruning, and insect and disease control, consult Publication 10, Tree Fruits in the Home Garden, and Publication 46, Spraying Home Fruit.

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