



Getting Started with Fruit Trees

Growing your own fruit can be very rewarding. Nothing beats homegrown apples or plums picked fresh from the tree. Fruit trees also make wonderful aesthetic additions to the landscape, sporting cheerful blooms in the spring and lovely leaf color in the fall. They're also a great way to attract more birds and pollinators to your garden.

While there are many benefits, there are some important things to consider when choosing what fruit to grow. Take a look at the information here, and don't hesitate to speak to a Sky employee with questions. Our goal is for you to be successful. You might also consider starting with the easiest fruit to grow in our area: blueberries, raspberries, gooseberries, elderberries and currants. Because they are closely related to PNW native plants, they are more adapted to our climate and growing season.

Light & Heat

All fruit needs a sunny spot in the landscape to be productive. Most require 6-8 hours of sunlight daily. Some need additional heat to ripen and are more productive when planted against a south facing wall.

Soil & Nutrients

Choose a planting area with well draining soil and fertilize according to recommendations for the specific variety. Usually, you'll want to use a nitrogen rich fertilizer in early spring and a balanced fertilizer in the fall.

Water

Fruit trees need regular, deep watering during the first two growing seasons in order to develop a strong root system; the first summer is especially critical. Once established they need, on average, one inch of water per week over the root zone, either from rain or irrigation. That's equivalent to about one gallon per square foot of soil surface area. Drip irrigation or long, slow, watering will help water soak deeply into the soil. Do not water lightly each day ; this can lead to shallow roots and a less drought tolerant tree. Overhead watering, which can get too much water on the leaves or trunk, can contribute to fungal diseases.

Pruning

Regular pruning is important for many tree fruit to allow sunlight to penetrate and air to circulate. This boosts photosynthesis, helps fruit ripen and helps reduce fungal diseases which are common in the cool, wet climate of the Puget Sound area.

Videos on Pruning Young Fruit Trees



Fast Gardening Michigan: How to Prune Young Fruit Trees - Apple, Peach, Plum



Urban Farmstead: How To Prune Young Fruit Trees - Peach, Apple, Fig and more

Recommended pruning publications

Taylor's Guide to Fruits and Berries - by Roger Holmes

Pruning & Training Revised New Editions - by Christopher Brickell

Thinning

Some tree fruit, such as apples require thinning for the tree to produce large fruit. This means removing some of the fruit when marble-sized to allow space and nutrition for the remaining fruit to grow and prevent overburdening the branches.

Pests & Diseases

Each type of fruit has their own specific issues with pests and disease. Talk to Sky's Tree and Shrub department for advise and individual care sheets on specific issues or check the links below for free publications from WSU.

WSU Extension Service Pest Management Publications



Organic Pest Management in Backyard Fruit Trees and Berry Patches



Pest Management Guide for Apples in Washington Home Orchards

Pollination

Some fruit trees are self-fertile while others require a compatible variety blooming nearby at the same time. For best results trees need to be within around 100' of each other for pollination. This can include a neighbor's tree. You can also plant a combination tree, grafted with multiple, compatible varieties. Check Sky's Information Library page for pollination charts to help choose compatible partners.

CHOOSING WHAT TO GROW

While all the varieties of fruit and berries sold at Sky Nursery are adapted to the Pacific NW, keep in mind there are a wide range of micro-climates in this region. Some areas are much warmer, colder, windier or rainier than others. Here are some things to consider when choosing which fruit tree is the best fit for you.

Apples

Apple trees need another variety of apple planted nearby for cross pollination. They will need pruning, can have trouble with bacterial diseases and have pest considerations to address, specifically codling moth and apple maggot fly. Planting columnar or very dwarf varieties can

make pest protection much easier to manage. These smaller varieties can also be grown in containers. It's recommended to thin apples when small to improve fruit size and to lessen damage caused by overburdened branches.

Apricots

Apricots can be difficult to grow in Western WA since they may break dormancy too early in our mild winters, then lose their blooms to frost damage. This means they produce a good crop only about one year in three. They may also require sprays for disease control.

Cherries: Sweet & Tart (Pie)

When choosing a cherry, you may find tart (pie) cherries easier to grow than sweet ones. Tart cherries are self-fertile and more tolerant of cold and humidity than sweet varieties. While many sweet cherries are self-fertile, a number of the most popular varieties, such as Bing and Rainier, require cross-pollination. Many sweet cherries, moreover, are susceptible to cracking if it rains at the wrong time. Because they are more susceptible to fungal and bacterial problems it is recommended to prune sweet cherries in August, after harvest when the weather is dryer. Whichever cherry you grow, you will need to protect the fruit from birds!

Peaches & Nectarines

These trees can be challenging to grow and may not be very productive as they prefer a long, hot summer. For best results plant in a sunny location such as a south facing wall. Most peaches and nectarines are self-fertile. They are subject to peach leaf curl which requires fungicides or other methods of prevention and control. Fruit usually needs to be thinned which can be done in early spring when trees are pruned.

Pears: Asian & European

Both varieties of pears are well adapted to our climate. Both require a second tree for pollination, or a combination tree, grafted with compatible pollinator varieties, and may need pruning and thinning. They can tolerate heavier clay soils, but are susceptible to blight and leaf rust. Asian pears bloom earlier than European pears and fruit may sustain frost damage in cold springs. Asian pears are picked ripe off the tree like apples, unlike European pears which are picked when mature but green, and ripen off the tree.

Persimmons: Asian & American

Asian varieties are self-fertile, but may have issues ripening within our short growing season. American varieties need both a male and female tree to produce fruit and are highly productive. They are astringent and require additional time after harvest to ripen.

Plums: European & Asian

Plums grow well in Western WA. Most European plums are self fertile, but may yield better when grown with a second tree. Aphids are a common issue, particularly with the European varieties, though they usually do not cause any permanent damage to the tree and can be controlled without spraying. Many Asian varieties require a second compatible variety for pollination. They bloom early and may set fruit poorly due to cold weather at bloom time. Both types of plums will benefit from regular pruning.

FOR EVEN MORE FRUIT...

Throughout the year, Sky carries many more options for growing your own fruit. Visit our website or come into the tree & shrub department for more info sheets, lists and care advice.



Sky Nursery
Information Library



Sky Nursery
Fruit Tree List

Scan above for info on:

Blackberries
Blueberries
Edible Ornamentals
Gooseberries & Currants
Grapes
Kiwis
Raspberries
Strawberries

Scan above for our list

of fruit tree varieties mentioned on this sheet, plus hazelnuts, walnuts, figs & more.

Keep in mind, our availability changes all the time! Call to check stock.