

How To Grow Great Fruits

Whether you grow them for the crops, to bring birds into the garden, or simply as ornamentals, fruit trees, shrubs, and plants are a superb addition to any landscape. I am pleased to announce that this season we have expanded our selection of fine fruits to include superior fruiting trees so compact that they can be grown in nearly any garden, yet so bountiful that you'll be munching delectable sweet treats all season!

Fruit and berries are far easier to grow than many people realize, and the benefits are tremendous. Flowers precede the fruits, and often colorful foliage changes keep the plant lovely right up to first frost. Find room in your landscape for at least one new variety of fruit this season, and enjoy the sweet rewards for many years to come!

Blueberries

Blueberry Darrow Blueberries are among the longest-lived of fruits, bearing reliably for decades. Darrow is a self-pollinating Northern Highbush (hardy in zones 4-7), so you need only one plant -- but you're going to love these juicy, sweet nickel-sized fruits so much that one just might not be enough!

Growing Great Blueberries

1. Test your soil before planting your Blueberry bush. Blueberries like acidic soil (pH between 4.2 and 5.2). Soil testing is often free or very cheap at the local County Agent or Ag Extension Office.
2. Place your Blueberry in 2/3 to full sun, and give them plenty of space. Then mulch well around the plant.
3. Prune about 1/3 of the canes in late winter, and remove any dead branches.

Raspberries

Easy to grow in most climates, Raspberries are one of gardeners' best friends. They self-pollinate, so you don't need more than one bush (though very few of us can resist a large stand, especially after sampling the first harvest!) And they are wonderfully flavored, with a delicacy that doesn't withstand much travel, time, and refrigeration. If you've never tasted a Raspberry straight from the plant, you're in for a wonderful shock!

My Raspberry of choice is fall-bearing Heritage, which is hardy in zones 4-8 and an all-around top performer that has become a classic in American gardens. Heritage is a red fruit that -- unlike most others! -- will hold up well on the vine, so you don't have to harvest every berry immediately. The plant has a terrific disease protection package, simplifying your maintenance. And the flavor is just fantastic!

Growing Great Raspberries

1. Raspberry Heritage Everywhere but the deep South, plant in full sun and out of direct wind.
2. At planting time, cut the plant way back to keep it from setting fruit this summer. You'll get much bigger crops and healthier plants by waiting a season for that first crop!
3. Mulch heavily at planting time, and work in a dose of All-Purpose Slow-Release Fertilizer.
4. Support the fruiting canes by growing them up and through a fence or trellis.
5. Give the plants an inch or so of water a week, plus one feeding of AlgoFlash at the end of spring.
6. Prune back in late winter, leaving just 5 to 6 canes on the plant. For fewer, larger berries, cut back a few more canes in spring and summer.

Grapes

Grapes are easy to grow in any sunny spot with good soil drainage, and they add color and fragrance not only when they set their summer fruit, but in spring when their flowers arise. Glenora is a superb American grape, resistant both to mildew and to Phylloxera, the disease that ravaged European vineyards recently. The fruit is simply delectable -- bluish-black, thin-skinned, and filled with tender, extra-juicy flesh! Hardy in zones 5-9, it reaches just 3 to 4 feet high or wide, so can even be grown in containers on the patio!

Growing Great Grapes

1. Great drainage is critical. Mound up the soil and amend it as needed to improve the drainage.
2. Plant the vine in full sunshine, protected from strong winds.
3. Don't fertilize, but do add compost and biodegradable mulch to the soil each year to keep it fertile.
4. Make sure your support is very sturdy, as grapevines are long-lived and become quite woody and heavy over time.
5. Prune in late winter, cutting back canes that fruited the previous summer and leaving any new growth. (Grapes fruit best on one-year-old canes.)

Fruit Trees and Shrubs for Containers

American gardeners have fallen in love with dwarf fruit trees, for containers, such as Citrus limon 'Meyer Improved', and why not? They're easy to grow, and you can bring them indoors before first frost to grow tropical fruit even in the far north.

Growing Great Fruit in Containers

1. Let your container size grow along with your plant! Don't put a tiny plant into a big tub -- choose a container with just an inch or two of extra space all around the rootball of the plant, then re-pot it as the plant grows.
2. Use Professional Blend Growing Mix or other premium potting soil in your container, and re-pot or refresh the soil every year in late winter.
3. Set the plant with its roots just under the soil line. This gives extra room for the root system to expand in the container.
4. When your plant is outdoors, water it far more frequently than garden plants and trees. Because it's limited to the space in its container, it doesn't benefit from the infrequent, deep waterings you give the rest of the garden.
5. When your plant moves indoors for winter, find a draft-free area exposed to some sunlight and rotate the plant at least once a week to expose all sides to the light.

Fruit Trees for the Garden

You don't need an orchard to grow these compact, heavy-bearing fruit trees -- just a sunny spot with about 10 to 12 feet of spread!

Growing Great Apples

1. Choose a location in full sun and protected from the strongest winds.
2. If you don't want to spray your Apples to prevent pest damage, snip off any young fruit that shows signs of insect or other damage. This is a good way to "prune as you go" for a bigger crop next year, too!
3. Watch for the first apple to fall from the tree, then taste it. If it's not ready, the texture will be very hard and the flavor "wooly." If it is ready, taste a fruit still on the tree to double-check, then pick the apples carefully, twisting the stem to release them. (They grow in clusters on spurs that bear for many years if left undamaged.)

Growing Great Cherries

1. Choose a sunny location, and make sure the soil drainage is excellent. If it isn't, work in amendments or build a mound raised at least a foot higher than the surrounding soil. Sprinkle in some **All-Purpose Slow-Release Fertilizer** at planting time, and mulch heavily, making sure the draft (a bump on the trunk) is at least an inch above the soil line.
2. If a late frost kills some of the blooms, don't worry. Cherries compensate for this by setting very, very heavy crops, and chances are you'll still get armloads of fruit!
3. Prune the tree in late summer, thinning to provide more light and air to all the branches.

Growing Great Apricots

1. Late spring frosts are a problem for Apricots (you'll still get the lovely blossoms, but the crop may be severely reduced), so if your climate is prone to unpredictable Aprils, plant your Apricot on the north side of the house. This will delay flowering, improving your chances of outrunning the last frost!
2. Do not plant Apricot trees in soil where Tomatoes, Potatoes, or Eggplants recently grew, and keep them well away from Strawberries. Apricots are susceptible to a common disease of these plants called Verticillium Wilt.
3. If your soil is on the heavy side, all the better. Apricots need good grounding, and for once, clay is preferably to loose, sandy soil!
4. Sprinkle in some **All-Purpose Slow-Release Fertilizer** at planting time, and add compost or other humusy materials in early spring to keep the soil rich throughout the growing season.
5. Keep them well-watered; they don't like to dry out.
6. You'll know the fruit is ready for picking when it has blushed a rich orange-peach, all green gone. Twist the stem quickly and firmly to remove the fruit. Like Apples, Apricots grow on spurs that will bear for several years if undamaged, so take care at harvest to remove just the fruit!
7. Just after harvest, prune the tree by removing the oldest fruiting branches right down to the trunk. This keeps air and light coming into the tree, and encourages the younger branches to flower and fruit more heavily.

Growing Great Peaches

Bearing little resemblance to those rock-hard fruits we see at the supermarket these days, homegrown Peaches picked straight off the tree are ambrosial in fragrance and flavor. You won't believe the difference in texture, aroma, and taste -- and while they make great pies and preserves, they're so sweet and delectable eaten fresh, it seems almost a shame to add anything to them!

1. Unlike rough-and-ready Apples and Cherries, Peach trees are not for every climate. They need long, hot summers, yet they also must have a period of chill to set fruit. And they'd prefer their spring weather dry, thank you. That said, you'll find them fruiting happily in the humid, warm-winter south, the wet springs of the northwest, and right through zone 5 in the north!
2. Peaches bear fruit on one-year-old wood, so prune the branches that fruited during the past year. When you prune, thin from the center of the tree, to keep it as open and airy as possible. Prune in late winter or early spring, when the wood is dry and no rain is forecast for at least a week.
3. As the fruit grows, check it to make sure the Peaches aren't too close together, and thin the fruit as necessary to keep it at least 6 inches apart. You'll get bigger, better fruit and a much healthier tree with thinning!

Growing Great Paw-Paws

1. This tree, *Asimina triloba*, is so easy! In the wild it's often an understory tree, so you can set it in dappled shade or full sun and any moderately rich soil. Sprinkle some **All-Purpose Slow-Release Fertilizer** in at planting time, and give it a fresh dose of compost in early spring to keep the flowers and fruit coming.
2. As it ripens, the huge fruit turns from green to yellow and finally to black. For best flavor, eat it as it acquires its rich black color.

Growing Great Kiwis

Kiwis come from New Zealand but have made themselves right at home in the warmer parts of the U.S., and they're great fun to grow. These vines are male or female, with the female being a good bit longer and setting all the fruit. (You need only one male for up to 8 female plants.) Kiwi fruit ripens in mid-fall, and contains high levels of Vitamin C -- a good alternative to orange juice! Best of all, they don't seem to have much trouble with any pests or diseases, so they're just about maintenance-free. Now that's my kind of plant!

1. Plant the vines in partial shade, adding some **All-Purpose Slow-Release Fertilizer** at planting time. Kiwi is not fussy about soil type.
2. Once a month throughout the summer, prune every new branch back to four or five buds. This will give you a dense, compact vine rather than a giant rambling one!
3. Don't grow Kiwis near your Roses. Japanese Beetles like Kiwis and are generally harmless to them, but they can devastate a Rose, so don't risk an infestation!
4. In winter, before the vines break dormancy, prune every branch back to about 18 inches from the branching point.
5. Kiwis are ready to harvest when the fuzzy skin turns brown and the seeds inside are black. You can wait for them to fall or gently pluck them from the vine, taking their stems with them.