

The Grower's Spade

Horticulture tools for your farm and garden



Yadkin County Center

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Fruit Trees

A labor of love

Planting a fruit tree is an investment, one that can give back decades of sugary goodness for hours of hard work. I speak from experience; auguring holes, planting, building deer cages, spraying and irrigating 80 apple trees is no small feat. Tree crops require more forethought and long-term dedication than annual crops. If plants were pets, parsley is a goldfish, and a fruit tree is a racehorse. Don't be discouraged! There are easy, low-maintenance fruit tree options. If well-planned, planted and maintained, a productive orchard or a backyard fruit tree is well within reach.



Photo: Charlotte Glen

Many fruit trees rely on pollinators. Never apply insecticides when they are in **bloom**

First consider...

Before making a long-term commitment to your fruit tree "pet" consider the following...

Easy or Hard?

Not all tree fruits are created equal. A hard-to-grow tree, like peach, requires annual pruning, fruit thinning and pesticides applied every 2 to 3 weeks during the growing season. An easy-to-grow tree like fig only needs to be cut back if it outgrows its space, should not

be fertilized most years, and has few pests. So unless you want to pamper a peach, choose a crop that is low maintenance in our region (see list).

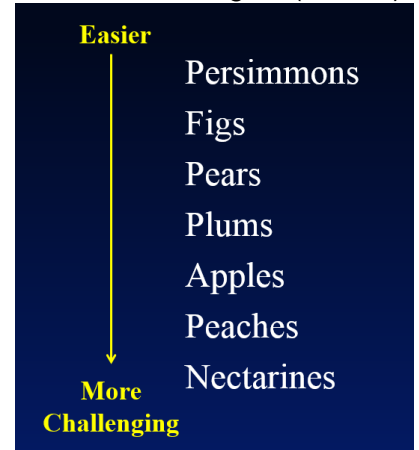


Photo: Charlotte Glen

What can you commit?

Can you provide water, fertilizer, pruning, and pest and disease management year after year? If not, your fruit tree will likely be unproductive and diseased. Picking fruit at a local orchard might be a better option if this is you.

What variety do I choose?

Opt for varieties that are adapted to our local climate and pests. This means a little homework. Find out...

1. Does it grow in my hardiness zone?

Yadkin County is in zone 7b

2. What is its chill rating?

Fruit trees require winter chilling to flower.

Varieties with 600-800 chill hours (hours <45 F) to avoid losing crops to a late freeze.

3. How disease resistant is this variety? What diseases is it susceptible to and how costly will they be to control?

4. Is cross-pollination?

If so, 2 compatible varieties are needed.

5. Do you have enough space?

Dwarfing varieties are often available.

Talk to home gardeners, local orchards and nurseries to find out what grows well in our area.

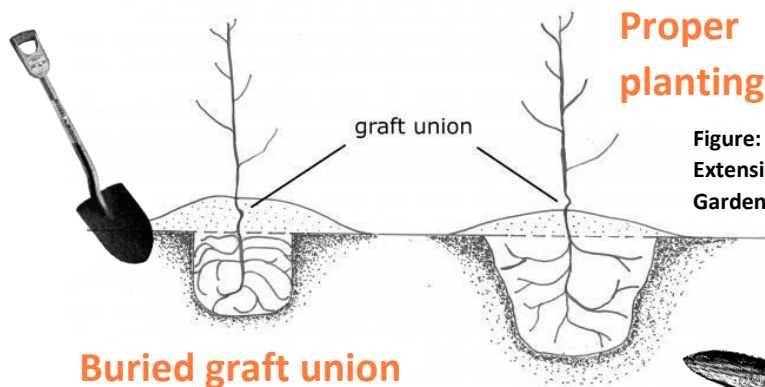


To plant a fruit tree

Late fall to early winter is the best time to plant fruit trees because the root system has time to get established before leaf-out in spring. Here are some tips.

Site selection

1. **DRAINAGE!** Fruit trees prefer deep, well-drained soils. The world's largest tree crop producer is California's Central Valley that boasts six-foot-deep sandy loam topsoil. Granted, this is hard to find in our red clay country. Avoid areas with poor soil drainage where water is pooled after 24 hours following a rain event.
2. Full sun. Fruit trees need at least eight hours per day.
3. Don't plant in low-lying areas or "frost pockets" where cold air gets trapped and a late frost can kill blooms.



Proper planting

Figure: N.C. Extension Master Gardener Handbook

Buried graft union

Planting

Now you are ready to plant...hold on, do a soil test! Soil test kits are available at your extension office. Submit separate samples from 0 to 8 in and 8 to 16 in depths.

Apply fertilizer and lime at the rate recommended on your soil report prior to planting. Before planting is the time to address major pH and fertility issues since future amendments must be surface applied. **DO NOT** put fertilizer or manure to the bottom of the hole at planting. Organic amendments and compost may be added to build soil health, but use no more than 1/3 of backfill soil.

Dig a hole as deep as the rootball and twice as wide. Break up the dirt at the bottom and sides of the hole to aid root penetration. Trim any excessively long roots as these may girdle and kill the tree. Find the *graft union* where you see a bend in the trunk or a difference in bark color. Set the tree in the hole so that the graft union is 2-3 inches above the soil line. Place dirt around the roots, tamp with your foot to remove air pockets, and water the area before adding the last few inches of soil.

Remove ALL metal or plastic tags which can choke or wound the tree creating an entry point for disease. Prune off 1/3 of the height at planting. Protect from deer with a wire cage - those white-tailed tree munchers can destroy a young tree overnight.



Hort Happenings

November

5 Planning a garden

Yadkin county public library

19 Food Safety on the Farm, 6-9 pm

2051 Agricultural Way Ste 201, Yadkinville



December

Merry Christmas!

Coming to you Winter 2020

"Growing Small Fruits" 3 part series – blackberries, blueberries, & grapes

Plant Spotlight

American Persimmon



Photo: Katja Schulz [CC BY 2.0](#)

"Persimmon, pucker or paradise" is what people know who know persimmon. The edible fruit is packed with natural sugars, but biter beware – if slightly unripe, its astringency will turn your mouth to cotton.

The American persimmon *Diospyros virginiana* is a deciduous native tree that grows along the edges of woods. Its long taproot makes it difficult to transplant. Female trees need a male pollinator to set fruit. It is truly "wild" tree that varies widely in individual trees. The fruit, 1-2" orange globes, are astringent until extremely soft, though it is a misconception that fruit needs a frost to ripen.

Preparation

Persimmons have a high sugar content and cinnamony flavor. The pulp is excellent for use in jellies, syrups, cookies and the classic persimmon pudding (if you have the patience to remove the 2-6 large seeds). I love scooping the pulp into a bowl of oatmeal to replace processed sugar. Mmmm, taste of paradise!!!