



## TREE FRUITS THEIR PLACE IN THE HOME GARDEN

Tree fruits can be a successful home garden crop but there are many problems to be overcome. If you are to be successful, you must obtain all of the essential information that relates to the growing of each fruit that you plant. Then, you must be sure to give your trees proper and timely care from early spring until harvest. Haphazard or careless attention to details is likely to result in disappointment or failure.

A major problem might be in the nature of the site and soil of your yard. A desirable site for fruit trees is open, free of frost pockets and with good air drainage. Sites where the winter temperatures reach -100 F to -150 F are not satisfactory for peach production. Other tree fruits may survive lower temperatures. An excessively wet or waterlogged soil is not suitable for tree fruits. However, some unfavorable soil conditions can be overcome by the use of subsurface tiles to improve drainage and mulches to improve organic matter and texture of the soil.

A second major problem is the difficulty of insect and disease control. Only the most ardent and conscientious home gardeners should attempt to grow tree fruits because of the time and expense required to produce fruit reasonably free from insect and disease damage. Modern pesticides can provide excellent insect and disease control, but they must be applied thoroughly and at the correct time. From 6 to 15 spray applications may be needed each season depending on the kind of tree fruit grown. However, disease resistant apple varieties are now available from many nurseries. The home gardener is strongly urged to plant these types of trees whenever possible to reduce the number of spray applications required thus reducing personal contact and environmental pollution with pesticides.

### ESTABLISHING THE TREE FRUIT PLANTING

#### CHOICE OF TREES

The fruit trees should be purchased from a reliable nursery or garden supply center. It makes little difference where the trees are grown, except that trees grown at distant locations have more chance of drying out in shipment than trees grown nearby.

In general, one-year-old trees are preferred to older ones, as less of the root system is lost in proportion to the top when the trees are dug. Trees older than two years are apt to be a poor buy. So-called "bearing-age trees" are usually trees which have had a tree digger run under them or trees which have been transplanted in the nursery. These trees have had their growth checked and it is very difficult to get them established. They will seldom do as well as vigorous one-or two-year-old trees.

Whether you buy dwarf or standard trees, excepting sour cherry or peach trees, it is essential that you



plant at least two varieties of a particular kind of fruit in order to provide for cross-pollination.

#### PREPARATION OF THE SOIL

Fruit trees should be planted as early in the spring as the soil can be easily worked. Fall planting of fruit trees is not recommended for Massachusetts because there is too much risk of winter injury. The soil may be prepared prior to planting. However, it is possible by the application of sufficient mulching materials around the tree to maintain satisfactory growth on fruit trees set in heavy grass sod.

Dwarf trees will not thrive in competition with weeds or tall grass. With adequate fertilization, they may be grown successfully in a clipped lawn, in sod with additional mulch applied, or under cultivation.

Fruit trees grow best in a soil that is slightly acid (pH 6.0 to 6.5). Have your soil tested to determine pH and apply sufficient high-magnesium lime to maintain a soil pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Lime may be applied any time during the year.

#### PLANTING THE TREES

Dig the hole for the tree large enough to take in the whole root system. Set the tree in the soil about the same depth as it was grown in the nursery. Plant dwarf trees with the graft union 2 to 3 inches above the ground. The graft union is indicated by a slight swelling, a change in bark color, or a slight bend in the trunk near the root.

In planting a tree, the soil should be thoroughly tamped around the roots so that they will be in contact with moist soil. It is not necessary to add water to the soil unless it is dry. Put no fertilizer or manure in the hole at planting time as there is too much risk of injury to the tree roots from the concentrated fertilizer solution.

Training and pruning young trees is important in determining the strength and bearing capacity of the tree throughout its whole productive life. It would be helpful to have someone with experience show you how to prune a young tree. Indiscriminate pruning of a young fruit tree will delay the age at which it starts to bear a significant crop and may also produce a tree of weak crotches which will break down under the first heavy crop.

#### PEST CONTROL

All purpose spray or dust mixtures are obtainable from garden centers and stores selling garden supplies.

#### RODENT AND RABBIT CONTROL

Mice are a serious pest in young orchards and can kill or permanently injure trees. The use of wire hardware cloth guards or plastic tree guards around the trunk of the tree and several inches of sand applied to the base of the tree and extending in a two-foot circle helps reduce mouse injury. The hardware cloth must have three or four wires to the inch to be mouse-proof. Push the base of the hardware cloth or plastic tree guard into the sand to help prevent mice tunneling under the guards and girdling the trees. The practice of keeping the soil area around the tree trunk free of tall grass and weeds during the late summer and fall is of special value in preventing girdling.

Rabbits and woodchucks sometimes cause considerable injury to young trees. The use of wire guards and/or repellants may offer some protection against rabbit damage. The wire or plastic guards should help reduce woodchuck damage.