

Fruit Fast Facts

Quick answers to common questions about the many types of fruit that we can grow here.

Bare root fruit trees and vines are planted while they remain dormant, which is through the months of January and February. Citrus, being evergreen subtropical plants, are not sold bare root, and are best planted in warmer weather.

What's easiest?

Figs. Big, fast-growing trees with no common pests or diseases. Home garden varieties don't even need pollinators to set fruit.

Also very easy: quince, jujube, pomegranate, persimmon.

What fruits the fastest?

Peaches and nectarines fruit on the wood that grew last summer, so they often yield in the second year. Most other types need another year or so to begin producing fruit. Caneberries (blackberries, boysenberries, youngberries, loganberries, and more) also fruit on last year's growth. Strawberries bloom and set fruit just a few weeks after you plant them.

What produces the most?

Plums. In terms of fruit per square foot, you can't beat them. In fact, over time they may fruit so much that the trees begin to split apart. Prune the trees more severely as the years go by.

What's the most drought tolerant?

Figs can grow and yield without summer irrigation here. Pomegranates are nearly as drought tolerant; I water mine once a month.

I suppose the *most* drought tolerant of all is prickly pear cactus, which yields sweet fruit as well as fresh green pads for *nopales*.

What's least drought tolerant?

Apples and pears. Yield is reduced and fruit sunburns if the trees aren't well watered.

Which can grow in a lawn?

Apples and pears!

What's least messy?

Pomegranates, because the fruit conveniently hangs on the tree for many weeks and isn't soft and pulpy. This is also a big advantage of citrus. They do drop, but not all at once. You can harvest some types such as Washington navel oranges for over two months.

What's the most work?

Peaches and nectarines. You *must* prune them severely to reduce fruiting wood or they will break from the weight of the fruit. They get peach leaf curl, which doesn't affect the fruit but stresses the trees, so many people spray to try and prevent it.

What attracts wildlife?

Persimmons. Most people can't use the amount of fruit a persimmon produces here. Good news! Cedar waxwings and jays will take care of them for you and are fun to watch in wintertime.

What takes the hottest sun?

Pomegranates. Tough plants from rough climates, pomegranates can even take reflected heat off a west-facing wall. At one house I planted a hedge of them to reduce the heat load on that side.

Which can grow in the shade?

Full sun is really best for fruit trees. Shade limits your choices, but plums will grow and yield in some shade. So will blackberries.

What's most cold hardy?

Probably apples and pears. This isn't really an issue for us, but the higher you go in latitude and altitude, the more likely you're going to see apple orchards.

Which can I keep smallest?

Peaches and nectarines, plums, pluots, apples and pears are often planted with limited space and then pruned severely. How you prune them depends on how they fruit (new wood, old wood, spurs, etc.) and what rootstock has been used. Espaliering, a process where branches are trained and tied flat against a fence or wall, is another traditional way of fitting fruit trees into narrow yards.

Which can I grow in containers?

Miniature peaches and nectarines. They need a pot at least as big as a half oak barrel, and frequent irrigation in summer. Run a drip irrigation line to the container from a nearby system, and then supplement that by hand during extreme heat. Fruit is normal size, and some are nearly as tasty as regular peaches. Blueberries, shrubs that grow about the size of a rose bush, can be kept in large pots. They prefer some afternoon shade. Many citrus are great in containers. Kumquats are especially attractive. Meyer lemons, Rangpur limes, and calamondins are attractive and very productive even when kept small. The bigger the pot, the better. Regular watering is paramount, along with monthly or seasonal fertilizer applications.

What are the biggest trees?

Walnuts and pecans are very large trees to 40 feet or more. Left unpruned, figs can get to thirty feet with equal spread, but they are readily pruned for size control. Blackjack is a popular dwarf fig variety, easily kept under ten feet.

What's prettiest in the landscape?

Red Baron peach has spectacular blooms in late winter over a couple of weeks. The fruit is very high quality, though it softens quickly.

Persimmons are very showy in fall and winter as they fruit turns color.

Pomegranates have copious bright red flowers in May, nice fall leaf color, and the ripe fruit is attractive.

What ripens the longest?

Figs give two crops a year: a light spring crop, and a much larger amount of fruit in late summer.

Mulberries produce fruit over nearly two months in summer. Some plums and pluots hang on the tree well, getting sweeter and softer for several weeks while they wait to be picked. Examples: Emerald Beaut and Nubiana plums, and Dapple Dandy pluot.

What ripens first?

In spring it's berries: blueberries, strawberries, and then boysenberries and blackberries.

In late fall the Owari Satsuma mandarins, ripening in late November, begin the winter citrus season.

What ripens last?

Late summer and fall harvests are quince, persimmons, pomegranates, nuts, pears, and some apples. Pears can sit on your counter for several weeks as they gradually get softer.

What's unique or unusual?

Robert Livermore walnut is a cross between the English walnut and a purple walnut subspecies. That latter parent, *Juglans purpurea*, conferred red pigment to the kernels. Jujubes, also called Chinese dates, produce very sweet, healthful fruit that you can eat like candy right off the tree, or dry to make sugary-sweet date-like treats. They are very drought tolerant and easy to grow.

Which can I prune as a hedge?

Stone fruit trees such as peaches, nectarines, and plums can be planted 4 to 6 feet apart and pruned severely and still give good yields. Pruning in both summer and winter makes it easy to control size and spread.

Which will cover an arbor or trellis?

Fruit that grow on vines are grapes and kiwis. Both need substantial support, careful training, and annual pruning or they'll clamber all over everything.

Which are best for you?

Pomegranates and blueberries are loaded with anti-oxidants along with all the usual vitamins and fiber. Jujubes, the Chinese dates, are very high in iron, calcium, and B-complex vitamins.

What's a hassle to grow?

Cherries. Spotted-wing drosophila fruit fly lays her eggs on fruit before it ripens, so each cherry is packed with wriggling maggots.

Apples require a lot of spraying to prevent codling moth caterpillars that like to burrow through the fruit, but at least you can cut away the yucky part.

What exactly is rhubarb?

It's a deciduous herbaceous perennial, meaning a leafy plant that dies to the ground each winter. The tangy part we eat is the stem, usually chopped and mixed with strawberries in pie. The leaves are toxic. Note: strawberry plants are ground-covering perennials.

What needs frost protection?

If it's a deciduous plant, it doesn't need protection. Subtropicals such as citrus and avocados may need protection, depending on where they are, how old the plants are, and which type you have.

Which are used to make alcohol?

Grapes, plums, apples, and pears.

Anything that contains sugar has been fermented by someone, somewhere, at some point in history. Grapes have enough natural sugar to ferment without adding any more, and yield a palatable beverage that stores well. Plums don't always require added sugar. Apples and pears from very ripe fruit can be fermented without added sugar, yielding hard cider of about 5 to 6% alcohol, so apples were among the first crops planted by English-speaking settlers in North America. Johnny Appleseed was distributing trees for booze: most apples grown in those days weren't suitable for fresh eating.

Which ones take over your yard?

Blackberries and their cousins root at the tips of the canes where they touch the ground, allowing them to leapfrog through shrubs and small trees and form thorny thickets that are very popular with wildlife – but not berry-pickers. Grapes can quickly run up and over fences and shrubs and trees, and can root if they grow along the ground. Some rootstocks used for apricots, cherries, and plums sucker profusely. Dig out any suckers as soon as you see them. I have a solid stand of rootstock on my property where an apricot tree used to be. Rootstock used for jujubes is very thorny and can sprout several feet from the tree.

Fruit trees are available locally in the dormant season at: Redwood Barn Nursery, Davis Ace Hardware, Lemuria Nursery in Dixon, and Three Palms Nursery.