

# FRUIT TREE INFORMATION

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Farmington Gardens    21815 SW Farmington Rd, Beaverton    503.649.4568    [www.farmingtongardens.com](http://www.farmingtongardens.com)

## What is a pollenizer, do I need one, and why?

Most fruit trees have a built in mechanism that prevents the use of pollen which is genetically identical or very similar to its own. So, a lot of trees can't use their own pollen, or that of another identical clone in producing fruit. Another tree of the same type will be needed, i.e. an apple variety needs another apple variety, pears need pears, etc. If you have a variety, though, like "Gala" apple, you will need a different apple variety for pollination, as all "Gala" apples will be incompatible with each other. Some trees, like plums and peaches, can set fruit on their own, but the general rule is that the aid of a pollinator will greatly increase fruit set. For those of you with limited space, a multi-graft, or tree with several different varieties on it, may be the answer. The pollination charts will help you to find suitable pollenizers for all of the trees we carry. Please note any incompatibilities, as not all trees will suitably pollenize others.

## How close will I need to plant my trees to ensure pollination?

They just need to be in the same general area. You don't necessarily need to plant your trees right next to each other, but keep in mind that the easier you make it for the insect pollinators to move between the trees, the more effective they are. So avoid major obstacles like houses, or tall dense hedges between trees. If your neighbor has an apple tree on the other side of a fence, and it sets fruit reliably, then an apple tree that you plant will probably also set fruit. Sometimes being in the same neighborhood is enough, if you have really active insect pollinators. But, you can't always be sure, so be sure to take adequate steps to place trees close enough to ensure good pollination. A good rule of thumb is "line of sight". If you can clearly see a tree while standing next to the other tree, then they should be fine. If not, obstacles may be in the way to hinder pollination.

## What can I do to encourage insect pollinators?

The main insect pollinators are bees. Bees will naturally do their work and be pretty self-sufficient, but one of their biggest enemies is a human with a sprayer full of pesticide. They are also insects, and can be severely hurt by common insecticides. Even fungicides, herbicides, or oils can severely damage bee populations if care is not taken when applying. So avoid spraying insecticides if possible during the pollination season. If you need to, try to use the least toxic product available, and spray in the evening when the bees aren't actively pollinating. The same goes for any other applied chemical, apply in the evening to avoid contact with the bees. If you leave them alone, they will take care of themselves.

## What is the difference between a "semi-dwarf" tree and the others?

All of our commonly grown fruit trees are grafted, where the desired variety is fused onto a generic, often hardier rootstock. With our common fruit trees, apples especially, years upon years of hybridizing have developed rootstocks that will shrink the ultimate size of a tree by a percentage. This is great, as a standard apple can reach 25' or more in time, and most homeowners don't have that kind of room. So, a semi-dwarf or dwarf rootstock is used. The ultimate size will be a certain percentage of the regular height, and so will vary by a few feet from variety to variety. Dwarfing rootstocks are very hardy, allow the tree to grow very healthily, and generally allow the tree to fruit at an age much younger than would be normally possible. For these reasons, the majority of the fruit trees we sell are semi-dwarf or dwarf. A semi-dwarf apple tree can still reach 10'-18' in time, so don't fret about buying a "little" tree, the better term is "manageable".

### **When should I plant my fruit trees?**

The best time will always be in fall through late winter, before the leaves have started to emerge. This allows a certain “rooting in” time which will help with your trees success greatly. Early spring is also a great time to plant, you just want to plant before the weather starts warming up or you’ll have to be extremely vigilant with the watering.

### **When and how should I prune my fruit trees?**

It is best to prune in the winter months. That way you can actually see what you’re pruning a little easier, and your tree still has its spring growth ahead of it so it can fill out. When pruning, check the specific care instructions for your particular tree for pruning requirements. With all of the fruit trees, you will want to go through and remove any branches that cross each other, any really long shoots should be shortened, and really small, weak growth should be removed. Watch for “suckers”, or sprouts coming from below the graft line right around the trunk, and cut these off promptly. And if you want to keep it smaller, don’t worry about pruning too hard, fruit trees are very resilient and will usually spring right back with no problems. Keep in mind though that different trees have different pruning techniques associated with them, so do your research!

### **What is a fruit spur?**

A fruit spur is a specialized branch that carries the flowers and fruit. On most fruit trees, they will appear as very short, tapered twigs, with “wrinkles” towards the base. Some trees, like apples, have fruit spurs which can live for 10 years or more, while other trees like plums will only keep their fruit spurs going for about 3 years. Fruit spurs need light to survive and function efficiently, so keep that in mind when pruning (they tend to only stick around in places that get adequate sunlight). This is why overgrown trees tend to have all of their fruit at the very top of the tree, and out of easy reach.

### **What kind of fertilizer and water will I need to provide?**

A balanced fertilizer applied in spring to the soil surrounding your tree will be greatly beneficial. For the first year, as with all plants, you will need to be sure to provide ample water. In years following, be sure to provide water in the summer heat and around blooming/fruiting time if it is dry. Keep in mind that it takes a lot of water to produce fruit, and so fruiting will suffer if ample water isn’t available. Trees that dry out in the critical fruit-forming stage may drop the developing fruit. Infrequent deep soakings are effective and encourage deeper rooting for future resilience. Constant watering or waterlogged soils will encourage disease problems.

### **What is a dormant spray? Why do I need it?**

Dormant spray is basically a product applied to dormant trees in the winter months to kill of exposed pests or diseases **before** they can become a problem in spring. With fruit trees being particularly susceptible to many pests and diseases, dormant spray can save you a lot of trouble with a minimal amount of effort. It is a good idea to schedule a few applications of dormant spray yearly, regardless of previous problems. Dormant spray is great prevention for future problems, and can save your trees before they become problematic. For complete dormant spray information, see the separate sheet on dormant spray.

### **When will my tree set fruit?**

The short answer is: when they are ready. A good rule of thumb is that most trees will begin to reliably set fruit about 3 years after planting, but may also set small crops before that. This can vary though depending on the growing conditions and fruit type, i.e. Cherry trees tend to take a while longer to start regularly producing, while a Plum tree may start sooner. Fruit trees are built to produce fruit, and they know when they are established and mature enough to sustain a crop. This involves lots of root growth, foliage growth, and the development of branches strong enough to support the weight of its fruit. It’s best to be patient and let them get settled in so that they can healthily provide fruit to you and your family for many years to come!