

# FRUIT TREE TYPES

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Fruit trees are a very popular item in the garden, as they allow you to have fresh fruit (often much fresher than that in a supermarket) straight from your own yard. The majority of our common fruit trees are actually very closely related, and so care instructions will often be similar or the same. With a little bit of the right care, you and your family can enjoy fresh fruit for years to come! Listed here are the common types of fruit, with their specific care instructions.

**APPLES** Apples are probably the most common of the fruit trees. They come in many shapes, sizes, colors, and tastes to suit just about any preference. Caring for apples isn't a difficult task, but there are a few things to remember when dealing with them. Being one of the larger fruit trees, apples can get severely out of hand if they are not tended to on a regular basis. Remember to thin branches out, and keep those really long "suckers" cut back! Fruiting "spurs" as the fruiting branches are called can only survive if they are getting light, so if you let your apples get too tall, the lower fruiting spurs will die, leaving you with all of your fruit at the top of the plant. Fruit spurs on apples tend to be very long-lived. Fruit thinning is also very important. Apples can tend to overproduce, and this weight can severely damage a tree. Go through when the fruit is about olive-size, and selectively thin out some of the fruit. This will result in larger, higher quality fruit, not to mention fewer split branches. In some instances, you may run into problems with "worms" (Apple maggots). For this and other problems, be sure to clean up well and spray with a **dormant spray**. During the growing season, there are various pest control products available for use as needed, although dormant spray is your best defense. And lastly, apple trees come in many varied forms, with different shapes and sizes available for just about any garden. There are columnar forms, dwarf forms, and multi-grafted forms, not to mention the wide array of pruning possibilities, such as espalier forms.

**CHERRIES** Cherries are an old favorite used for pies, desserts, or just fresh eating. Cherries are classified as either sweet or sour (pie) cherries. As for pruning, cherries are not nearly as intensive as apples, just needing an occasional corrective pruning or fruit thinning with heavy bearing varieties. Fruit spurs will also be long lived as with apples, and the same care should be taken to ensure that they get enough light. The main problems experienced by cherries are bacterial diseases. This is easily taken care of by applying a copper dormant spray in the winter months. Cherry trees tend to like it a bit drier, and may react poorly to wet conditions.

**FIGS** Figs are one of those "you love them or you hate them" kind of things. Some people absolutely love the taste of figs, while others can't stand it. If you like figs, you can grow them in this area pretty easily. Many types require warmer, drier weather to produce well, but we have an arsenal of hardy types that thrive in this area. Figs are usually large shrubs or small trees, and bear fruit on newer growth. In warmer climates you will get two crops, one in early summer on older growth, and another in late summer on new growth. In this area, count on the later crop to be reliable, the early crop is usually small if it happens at all (this is also variety specific). Figs can grow at an astonishing rate, so don't be afraid to prune if they get out of hand. Be careful about fertilizing- they don't usually require it. Excessive nutrients can cause a fig tree to grow way too fast and set very little fruit. Figs prefer ample water during the fruiting months, although they are rather drought tolerant if they need to be. Fig fruit is ripe when the necks start to soften, the fruit starts to droop, and you get a clear liquid from the stem when picked instead of a milky sap. You should take care to pick all of the figs, or at least get them off of the ground. Rotting figs are heavy bug attractors, mainly bringing in yellow-jackets and other wasps. One last note- figs are self-fertile and don't require a pollinizer.

**PEACHES & NECTARINES** Peaches are gaining popularity rapidly in the home fruit tree market, and are actually a relatively newer commercial crop in this area. Newer varieties over the past several decades have been introduced with increased disease resistance, better hardiness, and more reliable fruit set, allowing the home gardener in this area to enjoy fresh peaches straight from the garden. Peach trees will tend to be quite a bit smaller than some of the other fruit trees, and are best heavily pruned every year or two to keep them smaller and more compact. Unlike apples which have long lived fruiting spurs, peaches will only set fruit on a

one year old branch. After bearing fruit, that growth will usually never set fruit again, so it is best to cut it off and let new growth emerge so it can bear fruit. The main problem with peaches through the years has been their disease susceptibility, which is made worse by our generally wet climate. Newer varieties like 'Frost' are very disease resistant, but not necessarily immune. Older varieties can be absolutely destroyed if they become infected with certain diseases, so it is strongly recommended that you use a dormant spray a few times in winter, and plant your tree in a spot that has good drainage. This will save you lots of trouble later. Nectarines are nearly identical to peaches, and should be treated the same. Peaches and Nectarines can be very unattractive sometimes, so keep this in mind when placing one in the garden. Peaches and Nectarines are mostly self-fertile.

**PEARS – EUROPEAN & ASIAN** Pear tree care is exactly the same as for apples. One note on the fruit, you will want to pick it before it ripens, when it is still green, and let it ripen off of the tree. Tree ripened pears tend to turn mushy and brown. When they fall off the tree in their rotten state, they tend to make a huge mess and attract yellow-jackets like crazy. So pick them *before* they ripen. The worst problem for pears is usually fireblight. If infected, prune and destroy infected branches, and spray with a dormant spray in winter. You may be concerned by a lack of bees around your pear tree during the blooming season. Don't fret though, pears are actually fly-pollinated, and a lot of this activity occurs at night. Due to the need to attract flies to pollinate, you may notice that pear blossoms do not have the same pleasant smell as apples and other fruit trees.

**PLUMS** Plums are a bit different than most of the other fruit trees, as they would usually rather be a wild shrub than an actual tree. They are grouped into two categories, Japanese plums and European plums (Often referred to as prunes). Japanese plums tend to grow as a multi-stemmed shrub or low-branched tree, while European plums will usually be a low-branched shrubby tree. A little bit of pruning can go a long way in creating a desired form. Plums don't have long-lived fruit spurs, with optimal fruit set occurring on 2-4 year old growth. For this reason, it is best to selectively remove about ¼ of the oldest growth each year to promote a constant supply of productive branches. If you let the plants go for too long, they will produce all of their fruit at the very top of the tree, making harvest difficult, and posing a danger to the structural stability of the tree. There will be a difference in pruning between the European and Japanese plums. The Japanese plums grow wildly, sending off growth in every direction imaginable. This is made worse by excess pruning, but pruning is still necessary, so just keep on top of them and don't be afraid to prune heavily if needed. European plums are much more subdued, and will just need the yearly thinning of old growth, and occasional pruning to correct errant growth. Fruit thinning is generally recommended with heavy producing varieties. Plums tend to be one of the most pest and disease resistant of the fruit trees, but dormant spray is still recommended.