

Selecting Fruit Trees for The Home Garden

Picking and eating your own home-grown fruit is one of life's real joys and not to be missed. The variety of fruit trees available to the home gardener has never been greater and there's fruiting plants for every garden, whether large or small. I hope you enjoy creating your own edible garden.

Availability (or when can I get them?)

The best time to select and plant deciduous fruit trees is in winter (most varieties are difficult to obtain at other times of the year). Citrus fruits are available all year round. Tropical fruits are usually only available in the warmer months.

Planting (or getting them off to a flying start!)

Position : Generally all fruit trees do best in full sun positions.

Planting: for bare rooted trees: These are dormant trees sold during winter. When taken out of the pots the soil will usually all fall off the roots. When planting bare root trees, give them a good soak before taking them out of the container.

Dig a hole at least 60cm wide by 60cm deep. Blend one part Dawson's Organic Soil Improver with two parts soil removed from the hole. Add a handful of Apex slow release fertiliser and mix in well. Return some of this mix to the bottom of the hole.

Make a small mound of soil in the bottom of the hole. Take your bare root tree and position the roots so that they fan out over the mound. Before back filling the rest of the soil mix, check the tree is planted to the right level. The bud union should be above the soil level.

It's a good time to add a stake now, so you can see where the roots are. Then back fill the rest of the soil mix and water in well.

Planting Continued: Take the opportunity to add a soil wetting agent like Aqua Wett, at time of planting. Apply at rate of 50gms per square metre of soil and water in well. Soil wetters greatly assist deeper water penetration into our sandy and water repellent soils. You'll need to repeat the application 6 months after the initial application and repeat applications yearly.

When planting actively growing container plants, the procedure is the same except you won't need a mound in the bottom of the hole, just remember to set the plant in the hole no deeper than the soil level in the container and then backfill soil mix around the roots.

Use any left over soil to make a shallow well around the plant, this will help retain water and direct it to the root system. Container grown plants particularly those sold as bare rooted plants, are very vulnerable to drying out. To avoid this, ensure adequate watering is provided during the critical establishment period.

Watering (or adding the essence of life!)

When watering established fruit trees, 2-3 deep waterings a week is the minimum. When establishing trees extra hand watering for the first summer will be beneficial AND ESSENTIAL. Water young trees every second day for their first season, in their second year in the garden, 2 deep soaks twice a week will do.

What's a Duo?

A duo is when you plant two fruit trees in the same hole, this saves space, gives you more variety and provides cross pollination. For example you could plant Plum Satsuma and Santa Rosa together, this would allow for cross pollination, or say Peach Flordagold and Nectarine Fantasia. You can even plant a trio if you like e.g. three different trees. Just remember when planting trees, which require pollination, that you plant them with their appropriate partner. When planting a duo, plant the trees about 15-20cm apart.

Pollination (or do I need two trees to get fruit?)

Fruit trees requiring cross pollination include: Apples, Almonds, Cherries, Kiwi Fruit, Pears, Plums and Pistachio nuts.

Note: Dawson's carry self pollinating Cherry Stella and Almond All In One (these trees don't need a pollinator).

For further information on pollinators refer to the detailed 2005 Fruit Tree Guide.

Fruit trees not requiring pollinators (so you just need one tree to get fruit) include: Almond All In One, Cherry Stella, Passionfruit, Peaches, Mangos, Nectarines, Peacharine, Olives, Grapes, Figs, Citrus fruits, Mulberries and Persimmon.

Note: All Avocados are partially self fertile, particularly the variety Fuerte, other wise planting Hass and Fuerte will often give better crops.

General Fruit Tree Care

Staking

Many fruit trees, particularly those planted as bare rooted plants, will require staking for the initial establishment period. Plants should be loosely tied to stakes and generally stakes can be removed about three to five months after planting.

Fertilising and Mulching:

Mulching:

All fruit trees will benefit from maintaining a weed/ grass free area around them. You can further benefit your trees by applying a mulch around them (but remember not to mulch right up to the trunk of the tree as this can cause collar rot). Suitable mulching materials include garden compost, blended mulches, wood chips, bark and straw.

Apply mulch to a depth of at least 10cm, this can reduce soil water loss through evaporation, by a staggering 70%. So mulching is well worthwhile!

Other benefits from mulching include:

- Improved plant growth
- Breaks down over time, improving soil and seeding plants.
- Encourages worms.
- Suppresses weed growth, reduces soil erosion and looks attractive.

A dressing of manure such as multi mix or sheep manure twice a year is also beneficial.

Fertilising:

For The First Season: Sprinkle 50gms (one adult handful of Apex Slow Release Fertiliser in with the backfill soil at planting time. No other fertilising is required until growth commences. Supplement this by adding 50gms of a balanced all purpose fertiliser, such as Dawson's All Purpose Fertiliser every 5 weeks for the first growing season (spring through till the start of winter).

For Established Trees: Established trees have an annual fertiliser requirement of 500gms of all purpose fertiliser for each year of age. Apply two thirds of the yearly requirement in late August to early Spring and one in autumn (say March). For example for the spring following planting say, tree 3 years old, yearly fertiliser requirement would be (500g X 3 = 1.5kg of All Purpose fertiliser). This would be applied as follows (two thirds in late winter-spring = 1kg) and (one third = 500gms in autumn).

Yearly fertiliser requirement keeps increasing with the age of the tree, until the maximum rate of 5kg a year is reached in year 10.

Fertilising Continued:

Apply fertiliser evenly below the tree's drip line (the entire soil area beneath the tree's canopy).

Whenever adding fertiliser, don't apply to dry soil and make sure fertiliser is well watered in.

For Citrus: Apply 1-2 handfuls of Dawson's All purpose fertiliser in each of the months of September, December, March and May to each square metre under the tree.

Whenever adding fertiliser, don't apply to dry soil and make sure fertiliser is well watered in.

Pruning (or keeping them under control!)

This is a detailed area and beyond the scope of our discussion today. The best thing to do is to get a good book on fruit trees from your library or buy one. The main aim of fruit tree pruning is to establish a framework of productive fruit bearing branches, remove dead or diseased wood, inter-twined branches, thin over crowded branches and to control height. Fruit trees are generally maintained to a height of about 2.5m, this allows for easy harvest and maintenance.

Generally deciduous fruit trees are pruned in winter and it's a good idea to seal pruning cuts with a pruning paint. Always make angled cuts, just above an outward facing bud.

Here's some notes on fruiting characteristics of different fruits:

Apples: Fruit on two year old and older wood. Have long lived short stubby, fruiting spurs.

Pears: Bear fruit on two year and older wood (spurs).

Plums: Bear from long lived spurs. The development of additional fruit spurs can be encouraged by pruning back strong growing laterals to approximately 15cm.

Apricots: Pruning seldom necessary. Fruit on last season's growth and spurs.

Peaches and Nectarines: Fruit on new wood made the pervious summer. Thinning and pruning to reduce height usually necessary.

Thinning

Once your fruit trees have established and started to bear well 4-6 years, you might need to consider thinning the fruit. The aim of thinning is to produce fewer but larger and higher quality fruit, evidence also suggests it helps trees crop more consistently from year to year.

Generally, thinning is carried out when fruit is about marble size. Remove fruit so that what is left is about a fist apart. For more details on thinning see a fruit tree book.

Pest Control (or saving the fruit from the birds and bugs!).

Bird Control : Use nets and simple reflective devices (like those old scratched CD's that won't play any more.... hang these among the branches and the "glint" might help deter feathered fruit thieves.

The Dreaded Fruit Fly: It would be hard to do a talk about fruit trees and ignore fruit fly. Fruit fly damage fruit and in our climate they are a fact of life. The question gets down to how best to control the little blighters!

In Perth fruit fly is a particular problem on most summer fruits, particularly stone fruits and figs.

There are three control options.

1) Eco-Naturalure is an organic fruit fly bait, which only targets fruit fly and is non toxic to animals and humans. The application of eco-Naturalure is quite different from other Fruit fly sprays. No blanket spraying is needed, and fruit itself doesn't need to be sprayed. Eco-Naturalure is sprayed either into plant foliage or fly resting places such as branches, nearby posts for fencing. It is applied as a preventative spray and needs to be reapplied every 7 days while fruit fly is active. It is important to commence spraying about 6-8 weeks before fruit maturity . Individual trees are protected by spot spraying into the foliage or a nearby non porous board.

Foliage application: for individual trees mix 10ml Eco-Naturalure with 60ml of water. Apply as a 1m² spot on the lower foliage of the tree canopy, or at mid height of smaller plants. Set nozzle to a coarse droplet size for ease of application. Repeated sprays on the same leaves may cause sooty mould to develop. Rotate spot positions regularly to avoid this occurring.

Board Application: For every spot, mix 10ml of Eco-Naturalure with 15mls of water. Spray solution over 1m² of board. Set nozzle to coarse for ease of application. Hang boards within the tree canopy or as close to the plants as possible. Over time mould may grow on the board and inhibit the action of the spray. Keep the board reasonably clean for best results. Ideal board materials include old painted woods, plywood, particle board and masonite. Other surfaces may be too absorbent and cause the droplets to dry out too soon. Don't spray on metal fences they get too hot.

2) You can also try making homemade fruit fly baits. These are easily made out of a used plastic soft drink bottle. Melt 1 or 2 holes in the bottle about three quarters of the way up the bottle (make the holes wide enough, that a pen would fit through). Above and below the these holes apply a band of bright yellow electrician's tape. Fill the bottle to about half way with a mixture of beer and Vegemite, Vegemite and water, urine and vegemite, Coke, honey/water and vanilla essence. (It doesn't really matter what you use as long as you've got a protein and sugar source). The yellow bands help attract the fruit fly.

Remember to screw the lid back on and then hang bait among the branches of your trees. The more baits the better.

You'll need to begin baiting at least six to eight weeks before harvest and change the wicked brew every couple of weeks. You'll be amazed how many fruit flies you catch. Good hygiene around your fruit trees also helps. Remove all old and rotten fruit off trees after harvest and old fruit off the ground. The best thing to do with it: put it in a plastic bag and tie it tightly and leave in the sun for a few days, then into the bin.

Peach Curly Leaf: This disease effects new spring growth, producing ugly distorted foliage and damaged growth. It effects: Peaches, nectarines and sometimes apricots and almonds. Control is easy. Apply two sprays with a copper based spray such Yates Fungus Fighter before spring growth starts. Apply once in July and the once again at pink bud stage.

Good Luck, I hope you'll enjoy your home harvest!

Notes prepared by Tim Parker



FORRESTFIELD

160 Hale Road
Ph 94536533
Fax 94539520

SWANBOURNE

153 Railway Street
Ph 93849652
Fax 93832108

O'CONNOR

388 South Street
Ph 93147258
Fax 93147264

JOONDALUP

Cnr Joondalup Drv
& Cord St
Ph 93000733
Fax 93001244

www.dawsonsgardenworld.com.au