

Adding *Flavor* to Your **LANDSCAPE**

GROW FRESH FRUIT WITH A HOBBY ORCHARD

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRISKE ORCHARDS



following a popular trend of growing local and sustainable living, edible fruit trees are increasingly being used as ornamental trees in residential landscapes.

While traditional flowering ornamental trees have been hybridized to be fruitless for maintenance concerns, edible fruit trees are making a comeback due to their value of producing fresh fruit that can be enjoyed by friends and family.

Although fruit producing trees have been planted as a food source on residential properties for thousands of years, the industrial movement promoted city living and automobiles as a means of transportation. Fruit trees became grown in large orchards located outside of town and their product shipped to cities for consumption.

Currently, the majority of edible fruit is still grown in large orchards, but consumers are becoming aware of the positives of locally grown produce. "Hobby orchards" are becoming popular and afford the homeowner ample rewards when properly cared for. While traditionally misunderstood and thought of as difficult to grow, fruit trees can be a fantastic addition to a landscape with proper growing conditions and a timely maintenance plan.

Fruit trees hardy to Michigan's climate include cherry, apple, apricot, peach, pear and plum. The climate and seasons of the Great Lakes region provide excellent growing conditions for fruit trees. When combined with good growing soils, fruit trees will flourish. Although each has their own specific growing conditions and schedule, there are some over-arching common principles that exist.

Fruit trees prefer sandy or loamy soil. It must be well drained and not have any standing water at any time of the year. They prefer a slightly acidic pH level (6.0-6.5 for all fruit trees) and testing the soil on your property is recommended. Fruit trees should be planted away from mature trees so they will receive the minimal eight hours of sunlight recommended and have room to grow. Fruit production is directly linked to water supply, so automatic irrigation or regular watering is beneficial, especially during establishment.

Ideally, fruit trees should be planted 14 to 20 feet apart, but can be closer in a hobby orchard setting if necessary. Fruit trees need to be planted in a group (minimum of 3) for pollination and one of the three needs to be of another variety. For apple trees, a nearby crabapple can serve the purpose of cross-pollination.

Fruit trees need to be pruned annually. Prune out any dead, diseased, crossed and touching branches. Prune any branch that is grow-

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FRUIT TREE *Facts*

DECIDUOUS VERSUS EVERGREENS

The farther north a fruit species grows, the more likely it is to be deciduous. Trees that are native to cold climate-- apples and pears, for example -- are always deciduous. If a tree needs a winter with freezing temperatures, it will be deciduous. On the other hand, fruit trees that are native to tropical regions -- papayas, mango and lychee, for example-- tend to be evergreen. They don't drop their leaves in the winter but remain green year-round. Fruit that is native to semi-tropical areas is generally deciduous but might be evergreen.

NOT FROM NORTH AMERICA

Most of the fruit trees grown in North America today are not from here originally. Apples come from the Caucasus Mountains that run through Europe and Asia. Apples were brought to America in Colonial times, and originally used mainly to produce hard cider. Pears are native to Europe, the Near East and temperate Asia. The pears on the East Coast of North America were originally brought by Europeans. Those on the West Coast were brought from China by Chinese immigrants. Peaches come from China and Tibet; plums come from Italy and Greece; apricots come from Manchuria, Siberia and Korea. Oranges are from China. One of the few fruits native to North America is the pawpaw. It comes from the temperate woodlands in the eastern United States.

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ing inward towards the tree (all branches should be growing up and out). Sun needs to enter the center of the tree to promote fruit production. Dwarf varieties exist for some fruit trees, and offer a more compact canopy that allows for easier pruning and overall maintenance. They take up less space, can be planted closer together, and reduce the need for ladders.

Fruit trees are fertilized in the fall. A 16-16-16 blend is a good choice for fruit trees, as it affords a healthy dose of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous to the roots. Trees should not be fertilized in the spring, as it will alter fruit production.

Pests often attack fruit trees; insects and fungus are the most common issues. Timely spraying will help ensure edible fruit production, and environmentally safe products are available for these purposes. When buds have opened and a chance of frost is present in the early spring, covering fruit trees with fabric or ensuring proper air circulation helps protect the buds from freezing.

Deer protection is a must when seeking optimum production for a hobby orchard. Fencing is one of the best options, and should be at least 7-feet tall. When properly designed, fencing can add character to a hobby orchard and help define the space.

The harvest season in Michigan begins in July for cherries and ends in October for apples. A variety of fruit trees in a hobby orchard provide many months of fruit as different varieties ripen. Whether canned, frozen, made into pies, spreads or fresh off the tree, fruit grown in your own backyard will undoubtedly taste better than that in a supermarket.

Many varieties of a given fruit tree are available, and the size of the tree will likely influence your decision of what to plant. Mail order works well for smaller trees (commonly called "whips"), but many homeowners would like a more mature orchard planted that will produce fruit more quickly. Professional landscape installation companies have the resources and expertise to install and maintain mature hobby orchards that may start to produce fruit the following year. Through site selection, layout, variety selection, planting and fence installation, they can bring your hobby orchard to life, adding character and flavor to your property. □

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