

## Planting, Nurturing Fruit Trees Requires Skill, Science

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Nowadays, in an era where the backyard fruit tree is often a vanishing memory, consumers might be justified in thinking fruit grows in supermarkets.

But a tree fruit expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences said homeowners armed with knowledge and an appetite for work can grow vigorous, tasty fruit.

"If you know your soil fertility, where to plant the tree, and the pollination requirements of the fruit tree or bush, you can reduce the need to use chemical controls for disease and insect pests," said Robert Crassweller, professor of tree fruit.

Crassweller explains that knowing where not to plant a fruit tree prevents years of disappointing fruit production.

### The Planting Site

Every fruit tree must have plenty of sunlight in order to fuel fruit production. Crassweller recommends choosing a site that is in sunlight most or all of the day.

"The faster the plants dry off after rain or morning dew, the less chance they have to contract a disease," Crassweller said. "Rapid drying will reduce fungicide use."

Fruit trees also should be planted in areas with good drainage and some protection from winds. "Northern exposures delay flower development in the spring and can help to avoid the damage of late spring frosts," Crassweller said. "But, they tend to be colder. The best site has an eastern exposure."

Crassweller warns that homeowners should not plant near the root zone of a black walnut tree, which produces a natural herbicide called juglone that inhibits plant growth. He also warns that strawberries or bramble fruit should not be grown where tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, or potatoes have been grown in the past five years. "A soil fungus called Verticillium can live in plant debris from those vegetables and infect the fruit plants," he said.

If only a small space gets full sunlight, Crassweller suggests using dwarf fruit tree varieties or planting the varieties as a property screen or divider. "Currants and

gooseberries are the only fruit crops that tolerate any shade at all," he said.

For drainage, Crassweller recommends observing standing water after a spring rain. If visible water remains after 24 hours, the soil is not well-drained.

### Pollination

"Pollination transfers pollen from the male part of the flower to the female part

of the same flower or another flower of the same variety," Crassweller said. "A plant that provides pollen to another variety is called a 'pollinizer.' In most cases bees are the pollinators."

Crassweller said a pollinating plant must have:

- A bloom period overlapping that of the plant requiring pollination
- Viable pollen

## Penn State Guide To Growing Fruit Goes Online

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Homeowners and amateur gardeners looking to sweeten their diets or slightly supplement their income can find helpful information at a new World Wide Website produced by Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Small-Scale Fruit Production" (<http://ssfruit.cas.psu.edu>) is a comprehensive guide to growing fruit in Pennsylvania.

The Website offers backyard gardeners and hobby horticulturists detailed advice and instruction for growing apples, peaches, pears, plums, grapes, strawberries, blueberries, and cane fruit. The site, adapted from the 161-page Penn State publication "Small-Scale Fruit Production," is aimed at people who want to grow fruit on one acre or less, and who are not legally licensed to use pesticides.

"The guide presents state-of-the-art production methods," said Robert Crassweller, professor of tree fruit. "Homeowners and hob-

byists will be able to read and understand how to use alternative types of pest control — called integrated pest management by growers — to reduce pesticide use."

The Website offers fully searchable text and many sharply defined color photographs showing disease symptoms and examples of insect damage, as well as photos of many different varieties of fruit trees and plants.

The guide instructs consumers on topics from preparing the planting site to harvesting the bounty, while also addressing subjects such as pollination requirements for trees and other fruits, soil fertility, monthly management tips, how to plant fruit trees, control of wildlife damage, and pest control.

Crassweller said both the Website and publication list nursery sources for trees and

A location close to the variety to be pollinated.

Crassweller said homeowners should be aware of other pollination factors. Temperatures below 60 degrees Fahrenheit will reduce bee flight. Temperatures above 85 degrees F will dry out flowers and prevent pollen from germinating.

"Other nectar-producing flowers can draw bees away from fruit plants, as can dandelions in early spring," Crassweller said. "Also, applying pesticides during blossoming will kill bees and other pollinating insects."

### Plant Quality

Buy well-grown, heavily rooted plants that are at least one year old. Blueberry plants should be two years old. Crassweller says consumers should buy plants listed as "certified," "virus-tested" or "virus-indexed."

"Brambles and stone fruit plants are prone to viral infections in the nursery," he said. "Do not buy a bramble plant that is grown outside a nursery. All of these plants should be grown in a greenhouse in steam-sterilized soil to prevent disease."

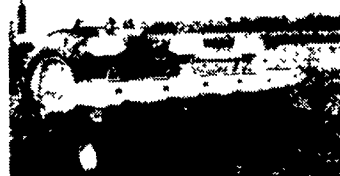


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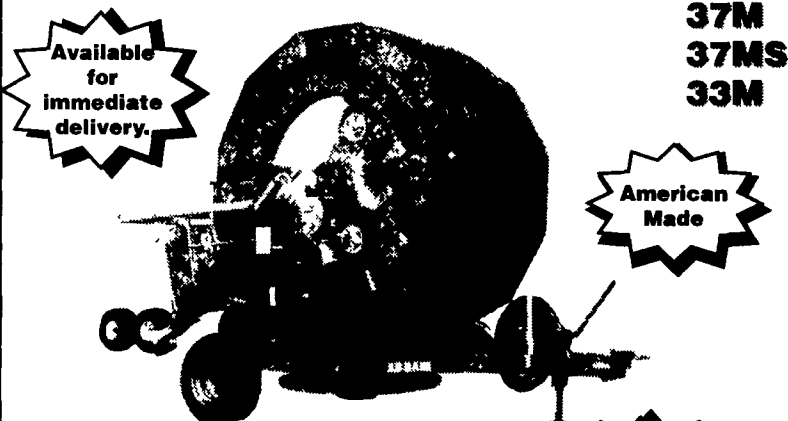
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