

Time to Purchase Fruit Trees

There are many fruit trees arriving daily in local garden centers. Now is the best time to plant them since selection is at its best, and cooler weather makes it easier for new trees to be transplanted.

When selecting trees, evaluate them carefully. Look for major bark damage on the trunk and limbs. It may be necessary to remove the cardboard trunk protectors when checking them. If purchasing bare-root trees, inspect the roots for damage. Bare-root trees should have a full and well-balanced root system. Containerized trees should not be root bound in the pot. Trees should also have approximately equal branching in all parts of the canopy.

When planting trees, it is imperative that they are not planted too deeply. This can limit roots' access to oxygen in the soil and can make proper irrigation more difficult causing unneeded stress to trees and making them more susceptible to disease. For a brief article on how to plant trees correctly, visit: <http://utahpests.usu.edu/htm/utah-pests-news/summer08/tree-planting-tips>.

Once trees are planted, it is important not to have turf around the root zone. Keeping turf away can double the growth rate of the tree and greatly increase its health. This also simplifies correct irrigation. Bare root trees should not be allowed to dry out for the first few months they are planted, but they should not be muddy wet either.

Fruit trees may need to be pruned once they are planted. Pruning correctly can be challenging but is a skill that can be easily learned. Many useful resources are available online or in various books. USU has an excellent pruning guide available at: http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/HG_363.pdf.

Several types of fruit trees perform well in our climate. Many apple, apricot, pear and European plum trees are cold hardy locally. In Cache Valley, cherry, Japanese plum and peach trees are often grown, but are slightly less cold tolerant than the others.

Two nut trees that perform well in Cache Valley are Carpathian walnuts and hazelnuts. When purchasing Carpathian walnuts, try to select trees that are grafted onto Carpathian walnut root-stock or that are seed grown. This prevents susceptibility to a devastating disease called Thousand Cankers Disease. It is less common for hazelnuts to become diseased in our climate.

Several species and cultivars of hazelnuts may be available at local garden stores or online. Of these, the European species produces the largest nuts, but may perform well only in the warmer areas of Cache Valley. In colder areas, other hazelnut species would do better and still produce quality nuts.

Nut production for both walnuts and hazelnuts can be increased, sometimes greatly, when they are provided another tree for cross pollination. Trees used for cross pollination should be a different variety of the same species. However, unnamed seed-grown plants may be available, and two separate seed-grown plants are generally sufficient for cross pollination. A seed-grown plant will almost always cross pollinate a name variety of the same species.