

Planting Fruit Trees

Spring is around the corner and will soon be time to purchase fruit trees. There are many things to consider before purchasing. Of great importance is locating a suitable spot with plenty of sunlight and good soil. If you are not sure about the soil, it can always be tested to make certain it is fine. An easy way to do so is through the USU analytical lab. Their website with information about testing can be found at www.usual.usu.edu. The test fee of \$14 is sufficient for most homeowners needs.

After finding a spot to plant, next determine how big you want the fruit tree to eventually grow. In apples and somewhat in other fruit, the same tree is available in dwarf, semi-dwarf and standard sizes. The size of a standard tree varies depending on species, but a size of 35 to 45 feet high and wide in common in most species. Dwarf trees grow to 70-90% of the size of a standard tree, and semi-dwarf usually grow to 40-80% of the size a standard tree.

For homeowners, especially with smaller yards, semi-dwarf trees are often best suited. They usually do not grow out of hand and require a little less effort to maintain. Dwarf trees are additionally acceptable for homeowners but are far less available. Dwarf trees do bare regular size fruit but less of it. One disadvantage to dwarf trees is that their trunks often must be staked or otherwise supported. Standard trees, besides growing larger in stature, usually take longer to bear fruit, dwarf or semi-dwarf.

Another aspect to consider before purchasing is that fruit trees require regular maintenance beyond what ornamental plants such as shade trees and shrubs. This maintenance includes annual pruning, fruit thinning and spraying. If one does not wish to perform this type of maintenance, it may be to their advantage to purchase fresh fruit from local vendors to avoid the hassle. However, much information is available on maintaining fruit trees. A very useful publication from USU, called the Home Orchard Pest Management Guide, can be accessed at <http://utahpests.usu.edu/ipm/htm/home-orchard-guide/>. It offers valuable advice. A USU Extension fruit tree pruning guide can be accessed at: http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/HG_363.pdf.

Once you are ready to plant, fruit trees are available in two options: bare-root and containerized (established). Bare-root trees have been lifted from the ground and had the soil washed from the roots. They must be planted while dormant in late winter or early spring and are usually less expensive. An additional advantage to bare-root is that a greater variety of trees are usually available, especially online and via mail-order. Once bare-root trees are purchased, they must be planted as soon as possible.

Conversely, containerized trees are fully rooted in a nursery pot and are available for a greater period of time in the spring and early summer. Because they are established, they are easier for homeowners to handle and maintain when planted than bare-root. Keep in mind that only the most popular varieties are available containerized.