Successful Techniques For Growing Fruits in the North

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Cultivar selection: Growers in the north must choose cultivars carefully because of our short growing season and frigid winters. For best results plant fruits hardy to zone 3. Choose cultivars that mature in September or early October. To minimize the impact of apple scab and fireblight consider planting disease resistant cultivars.

Site Selection: Protection from spring and early fall frost is important. Planting on slopes improves air drainage and minimizes wind damage. Apples do better on SE facing slopes, summer raspberries on N facing slopes and fall raspberries on S facing slopes. Avoid low spots or frost pockets. Full sun is best. Soil must have good drainage, proper fertility and pH. Make sure you have adequate space. A dwarf tree requires 75 to 100 square feet of area, while a standard tree requires 300-400 square feet of area.

Pest Control and Identification: Fruit crops have a variety of pest. Deer, rabbits, mice and birds can cause considerable damage. Physical barriers such as fences, cages and netting often provide the best protection. Control of insects and diseases and proper identification and knowledge of life cycle is critical.

Proper Training: To insure adequate fruit numbers and to improve the overall strength and appearance trees must be trained. A branch growing straight up will produce mostly vegetative growth, while a branch growing straight out will be very fruitful. Tree branch trained to have winder angles between the limb and the trunk are also stronger then up right branches.

Proper Pruning: All backyard fruits will require pruning at sometime. Pruning increases light penetration and air circulation, which will affect fruit quality and size.

Winter Protection: Sun scald is a common winter injury on trees. Planting trees on SE facing slopes helps minimize this. Painting tree trunks with white latex paint or wrapping the trunk with tree wrap also helps. Mulching is also recommended.

Pollination and Fruit Set: To set fruit flowers must be pollinated or fertilized. This occurs when pollen is carried either by an insect or the wind. Some fruits are self-fruitful. That is, pollen produced by the flowers of one tree will fertilize each other successfully. Tart cherries, plums and raspberries are self-fruitful. These plants can be planted singly. Apples and pears require pollen from a different cultivar to pollinate and set fruit. They are considered self-unfruitful, and must be planted in pairs with a different cultivar. Near by crab apples and wild apples often serve as pollinizers. Proper winter protection and frost protection can greatly influence the amount of fruit, since flower buds are set in the fall.

Additional Publications: UW-Extension has a number of Growing Fruit in Wis. publications these include Apples (13565), Grapes (11656), Pears (A2072), Raspberries (A1610), Strawberries (A1597)

Fruit Grower's Glossary

Apple Scab: The most common fungal disease affecting apples in Wisconsin. Symptoms include olive green to black lesions on the leaves or fruit. Best controlled by planting scab resistant cultivars and/or removing and destroying infected leaves in the fall.

Black Knot: A fungal disorder causing hard black swellings on branches found on many wild and cultivated species of plums and cherries.

Chlorosis: Yellowing of leaves, usually due to a nutrient deficiency or lack of sufficient light.

Cross pollination: The transfer of pollen from one flower to another of a different variety. Necessary for the fruit development of many plants. Apples require cross pollination.

Cultivar: This term is now often used in place of the older word, variety, when indicating a variation in a plant species. Cultivars may differ in growth habit, maturity, fruit color, or shape.

Dwarf: A tree that grows 8-10 feet tall. Dwarf apple trees bear fruit earlier than semi-dwarf or standard types.

Floricanes: Raspberry canes that have overwintered. Both summer- and fall-bearing raspberries produce fruit on these canes.

Pollinizer: The cultivar used as a source of pollen for cross pollination.

Primocanes: Shoots that grow during the current year in raspberries. Fall-bearing raspberries bear fruit on these canes in the fall of the current year.

Rootstock: The below-ground portion of fruit trees to which the scion cultivar is budded or grafted. Rootstocks are usually of the same species as the scion, but of a different origin. Rootstocks also determine the size of the tree, e.g. dwarf, semi-dwarf, or standard.

Scion: A piece of stem from the desired cultivar grafted to a rootstock.

Self-fruitful: A plant capable of producing fruit even if grown without another variety nearby. Does not need cross-pollination. Raspberries are self-fruitful.

Semi-dwarf: A tree that grows 10-20 feet tall.

Spur: Short, thick, fruit bearing stem on a branch. Apples and cherries are borne on spurs.

Standard: A tree that may grow to over 30 feet tall. Standard apples won't bear fruit for 5-7 years after planting.

Water spout: A vigorous shoot growing upright from a larger tree branch. Often grown in large numbers just below a pruning cut.

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