

FRUIT TREES

Nothing gives more satisfaction than the fruit tree. Not only do you get the bounty of delicious, tree-ripened fruit, but also beautiful blossoms in the spring and colourful leaves in the fall. If your yard space is limited, the dwarf or semi-dwarf fruit tree is ideal. This form of fruit tree is easy to care for, can be pruned easily, sprayed, and picked without the use of a ladder.

Dwarf and semi dwarf trees vary in size when fully grown. Some dwarf fruit trees can cover an area as much as 16' or more in diameter. The amount of dwarfing depends on the type of rootstock, the amount of dwarf interstem, as well as the type of conditions and pruning practices placed on the tree. Before purchasing a fruit tree, be sure to measure the space you want your tree(s) to occupy when fully grown. Be aware of the pollination requirements that certain trees need for fruiting. Apples, pears, certain plums and certain cherries require to be planted with another variety of the same fruit family for cross-fertilization.

CARE

Keep the tree well watered to avoid the stress of dry weather. Do this by giving a slow, deep watering around the dripline of the tree. Make sure the water sinks down about 12". You may need to dig down into the ground to see the depth of water penetration. Clear the grass to about 2' away from the trunk of the tree to prevent competition as well as injury from the lawn mower. Mulch around the base of the tree to help preserve moisture. Young, tender bark at the base of the tree may be susceptible to rodents or wildlife in winter. It is advisable to protect the tree trunk from injury with a plastic tree-guard. Keeping you tree healthy is its best defense against pest and disease.

LOCATION

Sunlight is extremely important to fruit production. The tree should be planted in an open area where it receives maximum sun. It is important to prune yearly to let sunlight through the branches.

FERTILIZER

Fruit tree spikes are an excellent way of fertilizing yearly. The tree should be fertilized only in the spring while it is still dormant. Over fertilization will result in excessive growth, a slow start in fruiting and poorly coloured fruit. About the first of August, tree growth should be slowed to prevent winter injury. This is accomplished by not adding too much additional water by allowing the grass around the trip line of the tree to absorb the extra nutrients. Come late fall give the tree a thorough watering to ensure the roots have adequate moisture to over winter.

PRUNING

There are as many ways to prune a tree as there are people who prune. Here are some GUIDELINES, which can be helpful:

1. Leave only a limited amount of scaffolds (main branches) evenly spaced, vertically as well as horizontally, on all sides of the tree.
2. The lowest branch should be no lower than 2' from the ground.
3. Select scaffold branches that have a wide-angle crotch (angle from where it is attached should be more than 45 degrees). During the second and third growing seasons it may be necessary to place spreaders (manual apparatus) between the branch and center trunk, thus forcing the branch to grow at right angles to the main trunk instead of straight up.
4. Cut out cross branches or any branches that touch each other. Remove dead or decayed branches regularly.
5. Trim back branches which are growing excessively so the tree grows evenly in all directions.

Remember - The purpose of pruning is to let in sunlight for proper ripening and to provide strong branches to support the fruit.

PEST CONTROL

A regular spray schedule should be started the first year and continued during the life of the tree. There are two reasons for spraying against disease and insects. One is to protect the trees health and the other is to protect the fruit.

Rapid leaf development and wet weather in the spring will require a regular spray application of fungicide at intervals no longer than two weeks. By choosing the correct spraying equipment, which gives complete coverage, and by closely following the directions that come with the chemical, good control practices of insects and pests can be maintained without upsetting the ecology of the surrounding area. Please refer to our FRUIT TREE SPRAY GUIDE for detailed information.

FRUIT YIELDS

Fruit production can be expected to start the second or third year after planting. First-year blossoms should be picked off to allow the young tree to develop without putting energy into fruit. Many of the young branches cannot even support fruit until the second year. The weight of the fruit can cause the young branches to break off. In later years, if the tree produces more fruit than the branches can support, the excess fruit should be thinned. This should be done in June before the larger fruit reaches an inch in diameter. Pick off the smallest fruit, leaving a minimum space of 4 - 6" between the remaining fruit. Because the remaining fruit is still relatively small, the tree may look like almost nothing is left. Yet, remember, it is better to end up with a sweet, smaller crop of good-sized fruit than a large crop of tiny tart fruit. Thinning the tree also ensures annual bearing, when a heavy crop is left on the tree it often bears only every other year.