



Urban Harvest

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Fruits To Plant This Winter: The Basics

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Winter is the ideal time to plant most fruits. At this time, temperatures are low so there is less evaporation from trees while the roots recover from transplanting.

Planting Time

If their roots are damaged, trees that lose their leaves should generally be planted in late January or February, and from December to February if they have been grown in a container. Fruits that do not lose their leaves-- tropicals and semi-tropicals such as citrus, feijoas, and bananas should be planted in March or April after threat of frost disappears.

Lazy Gardening

From a gardener's point of view, fruits have an important advantage over vegetables. Most survive for ten years or longer, producing more and more food with less and less work each year. With fruit trees, you usually need far less time spent weeding and watering, because trees have much deeper roots and usually shade out smaller plants. Because you can mow or mulch instead of weed, you can grow fruits in heavy clay soil.

Getting Good Varieties

Most fruit trees cost from \$5 to \$30 each depending on what you are buying, where you shop and how big it is. You can get many fruit trees for free by making cuttings (grapes, figs, pomegranates); planting seeds (citrus, passion fruits); or grafting (most fruits). Grafting is an easily taught skill that many people can understand with a few minutes hands on training and a lot of practice.

With woody long-lived plants, it is very important to get the right varieties. Just as with vegetables, some varieties produce more than others, resist local pests better, or taste much better. But plants that will live for years must in addition be able to stand our climate extremes 5°F to 105°F, no rain for months to 20 inches in a week, and winds that gust at 30 mph or higher. It is thus essential to get a good list of varieties and seek out sources of these plants.

One place to get such a list is in the fruit tree classes offered by Urban Harvest. Most of these classes provide seeds, cuttings, or graftings. Another place is at the annual winter fruit tree sales the last Saturday in January at Harris County Extension and Galveston Extension.

If you are beginning an orchard, probably the easiest place to start is with hard-to-kill types. For spring, fruit try domestic blackberries such as *Rosborough*; for summer, try a fig like *LSU Purple* or a

pear like *Tennessee (Tenn)*; for fall, try a southern hybrid muscadine grape like *Fry* (with a pollinator like *Dixieland, Ison or Cowart*) an early Asian persimmon like *Giombo* or *Hiratanenashi*; or a pomegranate like *Eve, Mae* or *Eversweet*; an early satsuma tangerine like *Armstrong Early*. For winter, try a late persimmon like *Suruga*, satsumas, bloomsweet or golden grapefruits, Meyer lemons, marmeladequats, and kumquats.

Stay away from peaches and other stone fruit: they are hard to care for and are best grown by experienced orchardists.

Keeping them Alive

Care of these trees is simple enough. Plant in sun in a place where water does not stand after a heavy rain. Fertilize with cottonseed meal bought in 50 pound sacks, applying about 1/2 cup per square foot under the drip line in February, May, and if the plant isn't green and growing well, in September.

Keep all first year fruits mulched 3 inches or more deep especially from April to October, and test dampness under the mulch weekly by sticking your finger into the soil, and when dry watering with a hose until the soil is damp several inches down. Do not water if the soil is damp.

As the tree gets bigger over the years, it becomes less and less likely to die from neglect, and provided it is pruned correctly produces more and more crop. To learn how to do this, contact your County Extension or borrow from a library Adams and LeRoy's fruit tree book *Growing Fruits and Nuts in the South*.

With these simple instructions, in a few years, you should have year round fruit and a lot less lawn to cut!

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