



Practical matters

Tree Wishes

Don't think you need acres of space to create a stunning orchard. Fruit expert Stephen Shirley reveals how to get a succulent crop from an average-sized garden



Say the word 'orchard' to a lot of gardeners and it conjures up troubling images of huge trees, complicated pruning and, worse still, the spectre of cross pollination. But don't let fear – or space – put you off growing a harvest of mouth-watering fruit. You will be amazed at just how easy it can be.

Just like vegetables, home grown fruit has a far superior flavour and texture to supermarket produce and, in many cases, the differences are far more obvious. Which would you prefer? A bright green apple, unripe and hard as a bullet with a flavour to match, or an apple butter gold in colour with a taste that is crisp, juicy and truly delicious? Both apples may be a Golden Delicious, but the first is picked early and store sold while the other is grown in your garden where it has been allowed to mellow and mature on the tree.

Fruit trees, bushes and vines don't need to take up a great deal of space. If you haven't got room for a traditional orchard or soft fruit bed, then why not incorporate fruit into the ornamental areas of the garden? Ornamentals that produce both flower and berries are often prized for their dual attraction and fruiting stock does this for free. The blossom of even the humble apple or cherry will easily match many ornamentals' displays, while peaches and almonds will beat them hands down. Currants wouldn't look out of place grown in borders, while grapevines and blackberries will happily oust traditional climbers along fences, over trellis or arbours. And as virtually all fruit can be container grown, you shouldn't rule the

Training college

Fruit trees can be grown in many forms or shapes, the most popular being bush, fan and espalier. Bush is ideal for the novice fruit gardener planting in the open, while fans and espaliers are ideal for those with less space who want to train fruit against walls or fences. Pruning and training will be required for all forms even if it is just the bare minimum 'containment' pruning. Don't let the thought of pruning put you off growing fruit. Many books are available on the subject which magazines, like *Grow Your Own*, return to every month.

Ultimately you and your secateurs are in control of how and where you want to train your tree. So if you want to maximise your space, grow it a little tighter than the spread would suggest and prune accordingly.



patio out of contention. even exotic fruits like oranges and lemons will do well in a planter sited in full sun. They can easily be brought into the greenhouse for winter.

I used to grow fruit trees (on dwarfing stocks) at 2m (8ft) gaps along a boundary border, with currants and berries trained onto the fence between. The border was 1m (3ft) wide and didn't encroach on the garden but still supplied us with ample to harvest.

The science

With few exceptions, fruit trees are budded or grafted onto a rootstock and it is this that controls the vigour and

ultimately the size of the tree. Broadly speaking, fruit trees can be divided into dwarf (allowing a height of 2m or less), dwarfing (2m or less) and vigorous (4m to 6m). For small gardens, dwarfing stocks are often the best option because you can easily keep it at a manageable size. But, beware, that reduced vigour will also impact on the yield. The more vigorous stocks will give the greatest yield, but your trees will end up huge and you'll need a ladder to harvest them. A dwarfing stock gives you the best of both worlds – enough vigour to produce a decent yield but a tree that can be easily maintained (with a little pruning). Aim to keep it

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EXTENDING THE HARVEST

A little thought will give you a succession of fruit through the season. Cherries are the earliest to fruit (June / July) followed by apricots, peaches and nectarines (July / August); early varieties of apple such as 'Stark's Earliest' can be eaten straight off the tree from mid August with other varieties of apples, pears and plums following on into the autumn and, with proper storage, until after Christmas. Incorporate a few soft fruits into your planting and there won't be a week in summer when you cannot pick fresh fruit.

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4 PLANTING SCHEMES TO TRY

If you're still unsure what to grow for your first foray into fruit, try one or more of these classic combinations.

Apple 'James Grieve', pear 'Conference' and plum 'Victoria'; these three old favourites complement each other perfectly. 'James Grieve' has the bonus of being dual purpose cooker and eater, while 'Victoria' is a very reliable cropper with good-sized fruit.



How about crab apple 'John Downie', damson 'Farleigh Prolific' and quince 'Champion'? They'll make the perfect (and traditional) selection for any jam and jelly enthusiast. 'Farleigh Prolific' gives a particularly heavy yield of juicy, blue-black coloured fruit.



A peach, nectarine and apricot combo makes for a more exotic collection and they are actually much hardier than people realise. More northerly gardeners can grow them in containers and move them into the greenhouse from Christmas until the last frost to maximise yield.



A tayberry, a blackberry and some raspberries will give you dessert fruit from late June onwards. Choose a primocane (fruiting on first year wood) raspberry variety such as 'Autumn Bliss' or 'Polka' and pruning will be as simple as trimming down everything once a year. They will fruit well into September.



around the 2m (6ft) mark, even though they will remain manageable up to twice that. A tree grown on a dwarfing stock is also suitable for growing in a container. The spread of bush fruit varies greatly, so read the plants individual descriptions or ask the nurseryman.

Tree's a crowd

How many fruit trees you need is an often asked question, but one which is difficult to answer. When it comes to tree fruit, one tree of each variety should suffice – unless you have plans for jam making or preserves. Similarly with hybrid berries – one plant of any variety should feed a family. For currants I'd suggest a couple of each and, when it comes to raspberries, I don't think there is much point in growing less than five of each variety.

What you decide to grow should come down to personal taste. Think about the varieties of fruit you like to eat and use that as your starting list. With one or two exceptions you should be able to grow the varieties of fruit you can buy in your local supermarket and a whole lot more. Most

nurseries and fruit suppliers are happy to advise on a similar variety or one that will grow in your part of the country.

Seeds of success

If pollination is the reason stopping you dashing out and buying a fruit tree then think again. There are self pollinating varieties of all types of tree and soft fruit. If space dictates room for just one apple, or one pear, and the variety you'd like to grow is not self fertile, then ask the nurseryman for advice on a similar one that is. If you are planning to grow trees that require a pollinator (sometimes described as self sterile) the simple rule is the trees must all flower at the same time or have overlapping flowering periods. These flowering groups will often be indicated by a letter code or number code in the catalogues. And stop worrying if a pear can pollinate an apple, or a cherry pollinate a pear – it's impossible.

Stephen Shirley is head nurseryman at Kent-based Victoriana Nursery Gardens. To look at its amazing range visit www.victoriana.ws or call 01233 740 529 for a brochure.

