

Growing Perennial Fruits (and Vegetables) in Seattle

Check out the edible selection planted at the Beacon Hill Food Forest; many of these plants were donated by WSN.



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Quick list of perennial vegetables for our climate:

Artichoke
Asparagus
Perennial Kale
Rhubarb
Tree Collard

Time to plant a long-term, edible garden!

When planting a perennial food forest, there are a few considerations to make before breaking ground. Budget—of both time and resources—should be one of your first considerations. A good edible perennial garden will require at least some upkeep, including watering and pruning to keep the garden productive and healthy for years to come. The bigger and more ambitious the plan, the more of your personal time you will need to devote to the garden.

Compost or fertilizer input should be another thing to prepare for, as many fruiting plants require at least some fertilization to remain productive, especially if you are starting out with nutrient-poor soil. A good starting point for any garden is to begin with a soil assessment at your planting site, either by doing a drainage test, pH test, squeeze test or worm test. Of course, sun exposure is also key. Many fruiting plants require full sun—consider planting leafy greens in shadier spots.

Spacing is important as proper airflow and water flow between plants reduces pest or pathogen outbreaks, so proper spacing is important in reducing any future needs for pesticides or fungicides. Cultural practices are always the first go-to when growing edibles under an IPM strategy. Knowing how large each plant will be at maturity should be a crucial part of your plan.



Selecting what to grow:

I always say, just grow what you like to eat! On the flip side, some things I didn't like until I grew them myself (I'm looking at you, tomatoes and rhubarb). Certain plants grow larger or are thirstier than others, so working with your soil, microclimates, and already established habits in the garden is a good way to find success with new plantings. Understanding the natural history of the plants you seek to grow is a great way to home in on requirements.

Watering, Fertilization and Pollination:

How much do you water? Keeping your fruiting plants happy during our summer months often requires supplemental irrigation, especially during the establishment period. Have a watering plan ready every time you add a new planting. Know which plants are naturally thirstier than others.

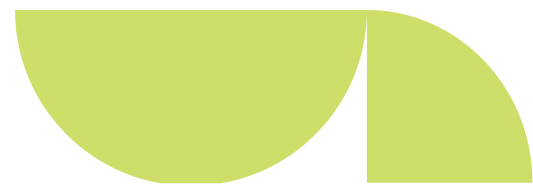
Building soil is extremely important for fostering healthy fruit production. Many plants will require fruit tree specific fertilizer to develop fruit properly. Down to Earth has a granular fruit tree mix I have used for over a decade on both commercial applications as well as urban gardens with great success.

Products for Fruit Planting Success:

- G&B Harvest Supreme
- G&B Soil Building Conditioner
- DTE Fruit Tree
- Malibu Compost Tea
- DTE Mycorrhizal Inoculant
- Agricultural Lime
- Apple Maggot Barriers
- Copper Fungicide
- Horticultural Oil
- Bt Spray
- Reflective Tape
- Tree Watering Bags
- Felco Pruners



Once your site has been adequately prepared, time to start planting! Select your trees, vines or shrubs and dig your hole as wide to twice as wide and just as deep as your nursery pot. I like to loosen up the surrounding native soil and mix my in-ground planting mix 50/50 with my native soil. Then I throw in some bone meal and mycorrhizal inoculant to the bottom of the hole. Backfill and soak, then water as needed, especially through the first seasons of establishment. Mulch in fall and compost in spring, and always make sure to never plant too deep!



Quick list of perennial fruits for our climate:

Trees:

- Apple (Malus)
- Pear (Pyrus)
- Plum (Prunus)
- Cherry (Prunus)
- Persimmon
- Nectarine
- Peach
- Fig
- Hazelnut
- Quince
- Mulberry

Shrubs:

- Blueberry
- Lingonberry
- Honeyberry
- Pomegranate
- Currant (Ribes)

Vines/ Canes:

- Grape
- Raspberry
- Blackberry
- Marionberry
- Hardy Kiwi
- Goji

Groundcovers:

- Strawberry
- Cranberry

Fruit Types



A European Honeybee pollinating an apple tree. Plant apple trees close together to ensure successful crop pollination. 100 ft is the recommended maximum.

Fruiting Trees:

Apple (Malus):

Apple trees can be incredible productive and long lived in Seattle's climate. Columnar and espaliered types are available. They will require a pollinator from a compatible flowering group and regular water and fertigation. Prune yearly to maintain size and overall vigor. Provide apple maggot barriers as fruit starts to develop to prevent blemishing.

Pear (Pyrus):

There are two general types of pear trees grown for fruit production: European and Asian. Asian tend to flower earlier and are more resistant to the rust fungus to common in our climate. Requires pollinator of a compatible flowering type. Prune during dormancy and use sulfur or copper fungicide preventative sprays during the growing season. Prune during dormancy.

Cherry and Plum (Prunus):

Cherry trees can be both self-fertile (sour cherries) or not (sweet cherries) and certain varieties can grow to be quite large. 3 years to production. Use reflective tape during fruiting to deter birds.

Plums are of either the European or Asian variety and can be self-pollinating or require a pollinator. Usually extremely productive once established.

Fig:

Figs are self-fertile, Mediterranean plants that require a sunny, well-draining site; plant against a South-facing wall for best success. Protect from frost when young. August ripening in Seattle's climate.

Did you know?

Many fruiting plants are sold grafted onto rootstock—so be sure to get in the practice of pruning off suckers as they appear. Rootstocks tend to be hardier, more disease resistant, or are used to dwarf the scion. Do not ever cover the graft with soil or mulch.

Fruiting Shrubs:

Blueberry:

Blueberries are one of the best crops for growing in Seattle—our rainfall and naturally acidic soils are conducive for maintaining long term blueberry plantings. Only semi self-fertile; plant with a cross pollinator within a similar flowering group (early-, mid-, or late) of a different variety to increase fruit production. Blueberry roots are shallow—provide regular summer irrigation.



Huckleberry:

One of our native fruits, this shade-tolerant evergreen shrub grows somewhat erratically and can be pruned to promote a bushier form. Plant in full sun for best fruit production.

Honeyberry:

One of the lesser-known fruiting shrubs for our climate, Honeyberries are both an excellent deciduous landscaping shrub as well as a semi self-fertile producer. Elongate fruit has a rich flavor, high in antioxidants.

Currant (Ribes):

Currants (Red, Black, Jostaberries, Gooseberries) are tart-to-sweet self-fertile, woody, deciduous shrubs. Prune for an open form and fertilize regularly as Ribes tend to be heavy feeders.



Want to grow in containers?

Many fruiting plants need to reach a large size to be productive, but some cultivars have been released perfect for patio gardens. Look out for 'Raspberry Shortcake', 'Baby Cakes' blackberry, or 'Blueberry Cascade' for your container garden.

Fruiting Vines:

Grape:

Grapes are self-fertile, woody vines that will prefer the warmest spot in your garden for good production in Seattle's climate. Rocky, poor soil is fine if it's neutral to acidic and has good drainage. Wine grapes tend to take longer to finish than table grapes, so choose an early-flowering variety for best production. Provide trellising or a fence for support and water regularly in summer.

Raspberry:

Raspberries are cane-growing plants best planted in the ground or raised beds (don't be surprised when they begin to "escape" their raised bed!) so trench a barrier to help contain runners. Can be trellised so they don't flop when laden with fruit. Raspberries fall within two general types, 1. Summer-bearing which fruit on the previous year's new growth; and 2. Everbearing which fruit on new canes. With summer bearing varieties, prune old canes right after fruiting, and with everbearing, simply flush to the ground in fall after fruiting is complete.

Blackberries and Friends:

You may be surprised to hear people intentionally growing blackberries in this area as we are all familiar with the invasive, non-native Himalayan blackberry; the blackberries sold in nurseries are non-invasive and thornless. 'Black Satin' is a popular variety with fruit sometimes as large as golf balls!

Marionberries are a popular cultivar (Marionberries account for 90% of the worldwide acreage of cultivated blackberries) and tend to grow close to the ground as a vining groundcover if not trellised.

Hardy Kiwi:

Rarely produced commercially, hardy kiwis are small berries grown on dioecious vines (needs both a male and female plant to pollinate, except for 'Issai' which is self-fertile) that can reach lengths for 30ft or more! Small, delicious, and full of nutritional goodness.

Happy Fall Fruit-Fest Planting!!!

