Backyard Fruit Tree Care

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This Can Be You!
Growing Quality Fruit

- Requires planning and long-term commitment
- Annual cultural practices
  - Pruning, fertilization, irrigation, weed control, IPM, thinning, harvesting
- Different fruits have different cultural requirements
Site Selection

- Deep, well-drained, productive soils
- Cold air is denser than warm air and flows down slope (like water)
- Gentle slopes are preferred
- Avoid “frost pockets” where cold air can become trapped
- There are some viable frost protection techniques
Minimizing Spring Frost Damage

• Select appropriate cold hardy varieties
• Damage usually occurs at 28° F or lower
• Maintain bare ground
• Covering trees to trap heat (PVC frames)
• Incandescent light bulbs
Rootstocks/Grafting

- Disease Resistance
- Dwarfing
- Graft Compatibility
- Precocity
- Scion is usually budded

“T” Budding
Tree Selection

- Bareroot trees are recommended
- Roots should be fresh and there should be no leaves or flowers
- They are shipped in large boxes with moist shavings on roots
- Don’t purchase the “bagged” trees at big box stores
Variety Selection

- Know your **USDA Plant Hardiness Zone**
  - Prescott, PV, Chino Valley are in Zone 7b: minimum 5 to 10°F
  - Dewey/Humboldt is in Zone 8a: minimum 10 to 15°F
- **Self fruitful vs. non-self fruitful** (requiring cross pollination)
- Select varieties that bear at different times
- Know the variety’s **Chilling Requirement** (continued on next slide)
Chilling Requirements
Recommended for Yavapai County

- Verde Valley (3,000 to 4,500 ft)
  - 600 to 750 chill hours
- Prescott (4,500 to 6,000 ft)
  - 750 to 1,000 chill hours
- These numbers are approximate and some fruit varieties do not have chilling requirements high enough for our area
- The Dave Wilson Nursery resource that we will share has most fruit varieties and their chilling requirement at:
  https://www.davewilson.com/product-information/category/fruit-trees (this is not an endorsement, just good information)
Planting and Pruning Bareroot Fruit Trees
Pruning Established Fruit Trees

- Modified Central Leader
  - Apples and pears
- Open Center
  - Stone fruits: peaches, nectarines, plums, apricots, cherries, etc. Some people prunes apples and pears this way too
Pruning: Modified Central Leader
Pruning: Open Center
Semidwarf Fuji Apple – 17 years old

https://youtu.be/OxU67I2pQVc
Fruit Tree Irrigation

- Flood/basin irrigation is probably best, basin should ideally be 2 feet beyond drip line
- Drip irrigation is also effective as long as it adequately designed and functions
- Microsprinklers will also do the job
- Apply some water during dry winter periods
- Mulching will prevent evaporation, but can also prevent the soil from warming
Fruit Tree Fertilization

• Small amounts of nitrogen fertilizer three times during the summer
• Water in the fertilizer
• There are also recommendations in the Fruit Tree Publication – remember to split the applications
Thinning Fruit

- Thinning improves fruit quality and can increase yields
- Thin fruit to be about 5 to 8 inches apart and only one fruit per cluster