

## **Back Yard Edens , Fruits for the North Florida Gardener Part One: Tree Fruits (Part Two will survey the Berry Patch)**

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**N**othing is quite as gratifying, and as liberating, as to coax food from the earth. And we who live in North Florida are blessed with an especially wide range of edibles we can grow. When you grow your own fruit you reap a rich flavorful harvest, and you control everything that goes into producing it. Another benefit of having your own orchard is that it allows you to grow fruits that are unobtainable in the marketplace. Rarely do you find such fruits as Pink Pummelos, an ancient grapefruit relative the size of basketballs with a smooth sweet grapefruit flavor, or Sanbokan Lemons, which taste like sweetened lemonade when you bite into them, in any market. But you can grow them right in your backyard. When was the last time you saw a tree-ripened fig in a grocery store? Figs come in such a vast array of shapes, sizes and flavors. Some, like Celeste and Nero, are so rich they're like eating fig preserves right off the tree. Growing your own fruit means being able to choose old heirloom varieties like Hood and Pineapple Pears for pies and preserves. Or having a Mayhaw tree to make your own world famous Mayhaw Jelly with. There's just so much to choose from. Starting an orchard with kids teaches them where food really comes from, instills a sense of wonderment for nature, and will give them memories they will carry with them a life time.

Here are a few things to consider before beginning your orchard;

Pick varieties that are suited for our climate. We're blessed with winters that will allow us to grow such temperate fruits as Apples, Peach, Pear and Plums. But you'll need to look for low-chill varieties that will fruit well in our area. We can also grow such subtropicals as Citrus, Bananas and Papayas. You'll need to choose more cold-hardy citrus that can take the occasional hard freezes we get, or be ready to protect them through the cold spells. Make sure they're grafted on Trifoliolate root-stocks, as this helps keep them dormant in the winter. Banana and Papaya are possible, but you need to know the tricks on making them fruit.

Choosing a site with at least 6 hours of direct sun will give you the best fruit.

No wet, soggy soils. Most fruits, except Bananas and Mayhaws, prefer dry feet.

Remember to ask if your chosen fruit needs a pollinator. Many fruits, including Apple, Plum , Quince, Chestnut, Paw Paw and Pineapple Guava need two varieties to set fruit.

Give them enough room to grow. Most tree fruits need 15 to 20 ft. to mature properly. If you're short on room and want to get a great selection try planting 2 or 3 different varieties in the same hole. Each tree becomes a "main branch" This allows you to have fruit that's ripening at different times. People who live on small lots can incorporate fruit into the landscape, enjoying both beautiful flowers and good things to eat. Many fruits make excellent patio plants. Citrus, Figs, Pineapple and Pomegranate all produce well in containers.

## Back Yard

Check out this list of tried and true varieties;

Apples: Anna, Dorsett Golden, Tropic Sweet

Pears: Hood, Baldwin , Orient, Kieffer, Golden Boy, Sug, Pineapple, Carnes

Peaches: Florida King, Suwannee , Junegold, La Feliciana , Tex Price, Southern Pearl , UFO Peach, Gulf King, Gulf Prince

Plums: Improved Methley, Byrongold, Bruce, Ruby Sweet, Gulf Rose, Gulf Blaze, Gulf Ruby, Gulf Beauty

Nectarines: Suncoast, Sungold, Karla Rose

Pecans: Moreland, Sumner, Elliot, Curtis

Chestnuts: Dustan Hybrid, Chinese Chestnut

Persimmons: Saijo, Great Wall, Honan Red, Sheng, Fuyu, Ichikikei Jiro, Hana Fuyu

Figs: Brown Turkey , Celeste, Hunt, Nero, LSU Gold, LSU Celeste, LSU Everbearing, Hollier, Tena, Alma , Jelly, Smith, Ventura

Citrus: Super cold hardy; Kumquats, Meyer and Tiwanica Lemons, Satsuma and Changsha Tangerines, and U.S 119 Orange . If you can provide some protection, the choices are much wider, including many Oranges , Navels, Tangelos, and even Limes and Blood Oranges as patio plants.

In addition to these familiar fruits, there are some more unusual edibles that grow well in our area. These include Mayhaw, Jujube, Asian Pear, Quince, Pomegranate, Olive, and Paw-Paw.

As you can see, there really is a wide range of fruit trees that we can grow. In our next article, we'll explore the world of berries and fruiting vines.

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