



MULBERRY

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INTRODUCTION

At one time mulberry was one of the treasured fruit trees on Southern homesteads. Planted around outbuildings and livestock pens, they were valued as beautiful, fruitful shade trees. Mulberry need little care and reliably produce buckets of fruit. Their blackberry-like fruit are seedless and make delicious jams, jellies pies and wine.

USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Mulberry comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some are large shade trees, growing rapidly and covered with broad heart-shaped leaves. Others are smaller and have contorted trunks and weeping branches making interesting specimen trees. Mulberries make excellent hedges when planted closely together and pruned frequently. Pick the variety for the spot and enjoy the bounty.

PLANTING AND CULTURE

SITE SELECTION

Well-drained, deep soils are preferred, but mulberry will grow on many soil types if good drainage is provided. Trees do not tolerate flooding. Trees will grow more vigorously and produce more fruit in full sun.

SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING

Mulberry prefers slightly acid soil (pH 5.5-6.5), but soils of up to moderate alkalinity are readily tolerated. If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, take a soil sample to the Cooperative Extension Agent in your county for a soil test.

Dig a planting hole approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Set that soil aside and mix it 50/50 with either aged mushroom compost, aged manure, or rotted pine bark & aged manure/compost. Remove the plant from the pot, gently

loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. To avoid burying too deep, make sure plant is positioned with the top most roots at the soil line. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. **Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole.** Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below).

If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk for good air circulation.

FERTILIZATION

We use and recommend the Espoma line of organic fertilizers. Espoma's Citrus Tone is a good choice for mulberry trees. When not available look for an organic mix that contains an analyst of roughly 5-2-6. Make sure they contain iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to type and age of plant, so read the instructions on the bag and fertilize accordingly. Spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant avoiding a 5-inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. For Zones 8a-10, fertilize 3 times each year in February, May and late July/early August. For plants further north (Zones 5-7), fertilize 2 times each year in March/April and June/July. **Never fertilize after August** (July in Zones 5-7) as this will promote new growth late in the year which will be subject to freeze damage.

WATER

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new mulberry. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply - this usually takes 40-50 minutes. Mulberry trees should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Fruit may drop prematurely if insufficiently irrigated during dry spells.

PRUNING AND CARE

Mulberries have few pests and diseases. White peach scale attacks the twigs and trunks of trees and may kill them. Dormant oil sprays in the winter are an effective and organic control.

Trees fruit on the last flush of the previous year's growth. Prune in winter to remove dead, diseased or crossing branches. Trees can also be pruned in the summer to control the height of the trees and create thicker hedges by heading back long branches half way. Stop summertime pruning in mid summer to allow the tree to set next year's fruit buds.

HARVEST

Fruit should be allowed to thoroughly ripen on the tree for best quality and flavor. Harvest by shaking the branches over a clean sheet in May.

MULBERRY JAM

Combine 9 cups crushed mulberries with 6 cups sugar. Bring slowly to a boil and stir until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly to, or close to, the jelling point (depending upon whether you want soft or firm jam). As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking. Pour into jars and either store in the refrigerator or process following manufacturer's instructions. Yield: 3-4 pints.