



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Pluot: A Wonderful Backyard Fruit Tree (December 18, 2021)

by Carol Bixler, UCCE Master Gardener

If you are considering planting a fruit tree in your backyard, a Pluot is a great choice. Pluot is a trade name for plum-apricot varieties. Pluots are genetically one-fourth apricot and three-fourths plum. Breeders have come up with some crosses among the various species which are sweeter than either parent.

Other backyard fruit trees can be harder to grow than a pluot. Pluot varieties tend to be hardier than peaches and nectarines, which can be susceptible to peach leaf curl. Apples and Pears can suffer from fire blight and codling moth worms. Cherries are delicious, but can be difficult to grow and are susceptible to disease.

The pluot's smooth skin closely resembles a plum--it is solid or speckled and ranges in color from yellow-green to black. The flesh ranges in color from white to red. The skin of the Pluot does not have the bitterness of the plum, and the flesh is sweet and juicy. Pluots are generally larger than plums and higher in sugar content; they are a flavor delight.

"Pluots" were created in the 20th century by Floyd Zaiger, a family fruit farmer and a truly remarkable hybridizer in Modesto, California.

There are many varieties to choose from.

- Dapple Dandy is a pale green to yellow with red or pink firm juicy flesh.
- Flavor Grenade is a large sized Pluot which has a crunchy texture like an apple.
- Splash has red-orange skin with orange flesh.
- Flavor King has a red-purple skin and red flesh, and has an intensely rich flavor with sweet spicy tones.



Plant bare root trees in late winter or early spring as soon as the soil can be worked. Soak the roots in water 1-2 hours before planting. Or you may wait until early spring to buy a potted nursery plant. Choose a site in full sun (6-8 hours per day) with well-drained soil. Space trees 12 to 18 feet apart. The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners have a handout on Tree Planting and Staking tips here:

https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/files/287111.pdf

Water deeply at least once a week during the first growing season. After the tree is established, back off to infrequent but deep irrigation.

In order to keep your pluot tree at a comfortable height for harvesting, cut the tree back to about 30 inches tall at planting. Dave Wilson Nursery recommends a practice called "Backyard Orchard Culture." The gist of Backyard Orchard Culture is crowding several trees in a smaller space than normal and treating them more like bushes than trees. Pruning is the only way to keep most fruit trees under twelve feet tall. The most practical method of pruning for size control is summer pruning. For more information, check the Master Gardener website for past newspaper articles, or Dave Wilson Nursery.

Remove vigorous shoots from the interior of the tree to allow air and light to penetrate the tree's interior. Pluots can be pruned in the open vase shape, like nectarines and plums, or with a central leader like an apple tree.

Pluots will need a pollinizer of a different variety to ensure a good fruit set. Most Pluots will pollinize another Pluot variety, or a Santa Rosa plum can be used. Utilizing the Backyard Orchard Culture method, you could plant two different varieties of pluot in the same hole. It's a good idea to pick two varieties with different ripening dates for a longer harvest time.

Pluots are prone to aphid attacks and various fungal foes. For a mild aphid infestation, simply use a high-pressure hose to spray them off or nontoxic neem oil and insecticidal soap; extreme cases may require dormant oil spray. Remember the least toxic method should always be the first you try.

If you're looking for a backyard fruit tree, give a pluot a try. We think you'll be pleased with their flavor and sweetness, whether eating them straight from the tree, or adding a complex flavor to a summer salad. Happy Gardening!

The Tulare-Kings County Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions:

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears Building)

Questions?

Call us: Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30

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