

I would like to grow my own fruit.

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Q. I would like to be able to grow my own fruit. What should I know about choosing and establishing fruit trees here in Redding?

A. The first step is to make a list of the fruits you'd like to grow, then check with local nurseries as they will have selected fruit trees that grow in our local climate. Try to avoid the temptation of buying from big box stores as they tend to ship trees for all of California and may not have the best trees for our local conditions.

When making your list, a couple things to consider are the ripening times for fruit, you do not want it all at once unless you plan to can or freeze it, and what fruit your family really enjoys eating. For example Persimmons are an easy to grow fruit but if your family will not eat them then don't waste your resources and space.

This is a great time to shop for fruit trees as there is a large selection of bare root trees available in nurseries in February. Bare root trees are less expensive than potted trees and much easier to handle and plant as you are not dealing with the weight of the soil. To plant bare root trees spread the roots evenly in a shallow hole, with a wire gopher basket if necessary, make sure the graft/bud union is 6" or so above the soil surface, backfill carefully with native, not amended, soil, and water thoroughly. Don't forget to paint the trunks of your newly planted trees with tree paint to protect from sunburn. Other things to consider in your tree selection:

Fruit trees need sufficient chill hours, temperatures above 32 degrees and below 45 degrees, to break dormancy. We have about 600 to 700 chilling hours here in Redding, so select varieties that have chill requirement under 600 hours if possible.

Consider choosing semi-dwarf or standard trees and summer pruning to control size. Many of the dwarf trees do not have the same quality of fruit. By pruning both in the winter for shape and then in the summer for size control you can keep trees short enough to easily pick.

Also determine whether a given variety needs a pollinator – true generally of apples, pears and cherries – and be sure to buy two or more compatible trees if that's the case.

If you experience spring frosts, choose late bloomers. Planting with a southern exposure and on a slope will also help with frost control. Cherries and Apricots tend to be the most affected by late frost, hail or rains and this can cause intermittent crops from year to year.

Peaches and nectarines suffer peach leaf curl virus here, so choose resistant varieties if you can. Apples and pears suffer from fire blight bacteria, so again, choose resistant varieties.

If choosing citrus, choose varieties that are more cold hardy and plan to protect them on the coldest nights.

For more information, go to U.C. Davis' Home Orchard website at <http://homeorchard.ucanr.edu/> .