**Autumn Prep for Planting Fruit Trees** Martial Cottle Park October 1, 2022

Note – we are *preparing for* planting trees. Actual planting will be in January-April! Also, we’re talking about planting in ground. Search online for info regarding growing fruit trees in containers.

**Place** – MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL – Lots of sunshine. At least 6-8 hours of sun daily. Preferably not in the lawn, or sharing the space with other plants, but sometimes you have to…

**Space** – How much space do you have? How much do your trees need? We planted roughly 12 feet apart in The Orchard. Dwarf trees are 6 feet apart. You can maintain the size you want with pruning.

**Soil** – Long term, hard to change, EXCEPT by regular application of organic matter. Jump start with steer manure, horse manure, compost, etc. Several inches, left on top or dug in, around the whole area the tree will eventually cover. Then cover crop, water it immediately to get it started. Cut down the cover crop to plant the trees, then mulch deeply (forever) with wood chips. DO NOT dig a hole and amend it with compost or fertilizer. Your tree needs to grow directly into the native soil.

**Water** – You want your trees to be on automatic drip watering. Figure out now how that is going to be supplied. Install underground plumbing BEFORE the trees get planted! A faucet close to the trees is all you need for now. After planting the trees you can put a timer and drip lines on the faucet.

**Choices** – This is the fun part, choosing the types of trees you want to plant.

* Choose what you like to eat! Check reviews for flavor, sweetness, juicyness, etc
* When does it ripen? Check the Dave Wilson chart (below) for stone fruits. Typically 2 weeks for one variety, but you can pick varieties from May to October. Citrus choices are virtually year round.
* Does it need a pollinator? Many varieties do, many do not. If it needs one, get one!
* How many chill hours does it need? Santa Clara Valley is usually around 500-700 hours. Anything over 700 hours may not fruit reliably. Fewer chill hours required is fine. Think global warming!
* Disease resistance – choose a peach that is resistant to Peach Leaf Curl, for example
* How big does this tree want to grow. You can control it with pruning, but some trees really want to be big (some avocados, mulberries, …)
* Find a place you can buy it. Common varieties will be at your local nursery. You may have to buy online to get exactly the ‘special variety’ you want.
* Consider multi-graft trees to get more varieties in the same space. MANAGE ACCORDINGLY!
* Consider ***genetic*** dwarf trees, especially peach and nectarine. They really grow smaller.

Resources:

* [The California Backyard Orchard](https://homeorchard.ucanr.edu/) – <https://homeorchard.ucanr.edu> - EVERYTHING you need to know, start to finish.
* [Getting Fruit Trees Off to a Good Start](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iucgjr5n1r0) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iucgjr5n1r0> - Don’s zoom presentation, step by step for the first couple years of your own orchard.
* [Fruit and Nut Harvest Chart | Dave Wilson Nursery](https://www.davewilson.com/home-garden/getting-started/selecting-varieties-and-rootstocks/fruit-and-nut-harvest-chart/) - <https://www.davewilson.com/home-garden/getting-started/selecting-varieties-and-rootstocks/fruit-and-nut-harvest-chart/>
* California Rare Fruit Growers: crfg.org/wiki/fruit
* Look for videos on Youtube, there are LOTS, some very good. Check their credentials!