

GROWING CHALLENGES WITH FRUIT TREES

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If considering planting a fruit tree this spring to grow your own delicious fruit, that's good; but be aware of challenges in growing tree fruits.

Many fruit trees are self-unfruitful, meaning they're not pollinated by their own pollen. For fruit production, two compatible cultivars of the same type of fruit tree need to be grown fairly close together.

Crabapple and apple are related and will pollinate one another; however, different types of most fruit trees will not pollinate each other. A cherry will not pollinate an apricot, nor will a pear pollinate an apple. And different cultivars of the same trees need to be compatible, usually meaning they bloom at the same time.

Of common fruit trees grown in Nebraska, apple, pear, plum and apricot are self-unfruitful and at least two cultivars should be grown. For information on which cultivars are good pollinizers, refer to our Nebraska Extension Nebguide "Fruit Tree Cultivars for Nebraska" available at extensionpubs.unl.edu.

Apple, pear and plum are the hardiest of these four. Apricots are hardy to zone 5 but they bloom very early in spring so flowers and small fruits are often killed by late spring frosts, making them more of a challenge in home orchards. The tree will survive, but there will be years with no fruit.

Apples are susceptible to a number of foliar diseases and fruit invading insects. Selecting disease resistant cultivars can greatly reduce foliar diseases, but plan on battling insect pests or at least sharing some of your fruit with them. Think about how you are going to manage insects and what the cost will be for all fruit trees.

Peach and most sweet and tart cherries are self-fruitful and only one tree usually needs to be planted for good yields. Peach and sweet cherry can be challenging to grow as they are not fully hardy to Nebraska winters and both are susceptible to attack by peach tree borers.

Peach and sweet cherry are best grown in well protected sites. Backyards where a good microclimate exists are safest. The Nebguide notes which cultivars are hardiest, but difficult winters can still take a toll on peach and sweet cherry, often shortening their life span.

Tart cherries are hardier, although best as pie fruit. Birds are a challenge with growing sweet and tart cherries. Beating birds to the harvest does not always happen. Netting correctly applied is the best way to exclude birds, but can be expensive and time consuming to put into place.

In small landscapes, and especially when two cultivars are needed, fruit trees take up a lot of space. Some trees are available on dwarfing (size-controlling) rootstocks. Use of such trees may be helpful for fruit tree growers with space limitations. This information is also provided in our Nebguide.

Growing fruit trees can be rewarding, but also very frustrating. Know what you like to eat and how you plan to use the fruit (fresh eating, canning, baking). Next, analyze the environment of your growing site to decide the best fruit trees to grow, then select the best cultivar or two for your situation.

Again, to aid with fruit tree selection refer to our Nebguide 'Fruit Tree Cultivars for Nebraska' found at extensionpubs.unl.edu.