

Growing Fruit Trees

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Fruit trees are a beautiful addition to your ornamental and edible landscape. Growing fruit trees can also be a rewarding hobby. Hardy varieties of apple, apricot, cherry, pear, plum, and plum-cherry trees do well in Southwest Montana. We carry select varieties for our high altitude and short growing season.

Care and Planting. Select a sunny site for your fruit trees, preferably with some shelter from the prevailing winds. Do not plant fruit trees in hollows or pockets where frost would settle. Space apple trees about 25 feet apart. The smaller fruit trees: dwarf apple, apricot, cherry, pear, and plum can be planted as close together as 10-15 feet. High density planting or training methods, such as orchard culture or espalier can be accomplished through thoughtful planning and specific pruning.

Plant the graft (the bulge near the union of root and top) at soil level. Leave a depression around the tree for a watering well. Frequent watering (once or twice a week depending upon conditions) is necessary the first few years and during any dry period, thereafter, to establish a healthy tree. Cultivating around the tree and a regular fertilizing program will also encourage fruiting. Apricots, plums, and cherries can be expected to bear fruit 2-3 years after planting. Pears and apples bear in 4-5 years depending upon the variety. Proper pruning in early spring is helpful to develop a satisfactory framework for fruit production.

Pests and Diseases Fruit trees must be protected in the winter from Voles and Mice by wrapping up to the bottom branch with screen or some material through which rodents cannot penetrate. Repellants or fences are needed in areas where Deer might be a problem. Use trunk wraps to protect from Sunscald that blisters and splits bark in the winter.

Fire blight is a bacterial disease that attacks apples, pears, and others in this family. It affects young twigs first, traveling down the shoot. The bark may look watery, dark green, or oily, and eventually splits. Leaves on affected twigs die, but persist. Fire blight is spread by insect pollinators and wind. It is seen more often after wet springs. To control, plant resistant varieties. If infected, prune out infected branches and sterilize pruners between cuts to avoid spreading the disease. Spraying does not cure Fire blight. However, trees can be sprayed with streptomycin sulfate to avoid infection. Spray first just before blossoms open and then continue every three days. Do not spray after fruit has formed.

Cedar Apple Rust is a fungal disease that needs both cedars (upright junipers) and apple trees to complete its life cycle. The fungus forms galls on cedar trees, but it does the most damage to apple trees, forming yellow spots on the leaves and fruit and causing early leaf drop. If possible, do not plant apple trees within 100' of upright junipers. Control cedar apple rust by spraying with a fungicide such as Fung-onil or Daconil just before the blossoms open, again when the blossom petals are falling, and twice more up to the middle of June.

The Apple Maggot burrows into the fruit, streaking it brown and making it unappetizing. Control by placing traps in the tree early in the season to catch the flying stage of the maggot or spray the whole tree while the fruit is forming with any accepted fruit tree spray.

Apples

Probably the easiest fruit trees to grow in Southwestern Montana are apples and eating crabapples. Any two different varieties flowering at the same time and planted within 100 feet or so will provide pollination for each other. Ornamental flowering crabapples will also pollinate apples and eating crabapples.

Apples that ripen early in the season (mid to late August) usually keep only a short time, even in cold storage. Generally, the later an apple ripens (September to October), the longer it will keep in cold storage. Apples can be left on the tree in the fall to temperatures as low as 25 degrees without harming the fruit. In fact, freezing temperatures are known to set the sugar in apples, making a better tasting fruit.

Apples grafted onto a standard rootstock may grow to a height of 20-25', a width of 25' at maturity and bear after 5-7 years. Apples grafted onto a semi-dwarfing rootstock will grow to about 12-15' tall, 14' wide and bear after 4-5 years. Standard rootstock is hardy to zone 3 and semi-dwarf to zone 4, possibly zone 3 with >4" of snow cover in winter. *Freedom, Haralred, Haralson, Honeycrisp, Liberty, Red Prairie Spy, Sweet Sixteen, Wealthy* and *Zestar* varieties are available as semi-dwarf trees.

Apple Variety	Ripens	Hardy	Bloom Time	Fire Blight Resistance	Flavor	Texture	Uses
Freedom	Mid	Zone 4	Mid-late	Very	Sweet	Crisp	All Purpose
Frostbite	Mid	Zone 3	Mid-late	Moderate	Sweet	Firm	Eating, Cider
Goodland	Mid	Zone 3	Mid	Moderate	Juicy	Crisp	Eating Fresh
Haralred	Mid	Zone 3	Late	Very	Tart	Firm	Baking, Pies
Haralson	Late	Zone 3	Late	Very	Tart	Firm	Baking, Pies
Hazen	Early	Zone 3	Early	Moderate	Mild	Soft	Eating Fresh
Honeycrisp	Late	Zone 4	Mid	Moderate	Sweet	Crisp	Eating Fresh
Honeygold	Late	Zone 4	Mid-late	Susceptible	Sweet	Crisp	Eating Fresh
Liberty	Early	Zone 4	Mid	Very	Sweet-Tart	Crisp	All Purpose
McIntosh	Mid	Zone 4	Mid	Resistant	Tart	Firm	Eating Fresh
Norland	Early	Zone 2	Early	Moderate	Mild	Soft	All Purpose
Red Baron	Mid	Zone 3	Mid	Resistant	Sweet	Crisp	All Purpose
Red Duchess	Early	Zone 3	Early	Resistant	Tart	Soft	Pies, Sauce
Red Prairie Spy	Mid	Zone 4	Mid	Susceptible	Sweet	Firm	Baking
Snow Sweet	Mid	Zone 3	Mid	Moderate	Sweet-Tart	Crisp	All Purpose

Apples (continued)

More Apple Varieties	Ripens	Hardy	Bloom Time	Fire Blight Resistance	Flavor	Texture	Uses
State Fair	Early	Zone 3	Early	Susceptible	Juicy	Crisp	All Purpose
Sweet 16	Mid	Zone 3	Mid	Resistant	Sweet	Crisp	Dessert
Wealthy	Mid	Zone 3	Early-mid	Susceptible	Tart	Firm	Dessert
Wolf River	Mid	Zone 3	Mid	Moderate	Juicy	Tender	Cooking
Yellow Transparent	Early	Zone 3	Early	Susceptible	Mild	Soft	Pies
Zestar	Early	Zone 4	Early	Moderate	Sweet-Tart	Crisp	Eating Fresh

Crabapple Variety	Ripens	Hardy	Bloom Time	Fire Blight Resistance	Flavor	Uses
Chestnut	Late August	Zone 3	Early-mid	Resistant	Nutty	Eating Fresh
Dolgo	Aug-Oct	Zone 2	Early	Resistant	Tart	Jelly
Kerr	Mid Sept	Zone 3	N/A	Moderate	Sweet Tart	Cider, Jelly
Whitney	Mid/Late August	Zone 3	Early	Susceptible	Sweet	Eating Fresh

Apricots

We offer several varieties of Apricots proven hardy to our area. Trees bloom profusely in late April to early May. Blossoms are susceptible to frost, so while trees may not set fruit reliably, they maintain high ornamental value with a beautiful spring display of creamy white, pink blushed blossoms and colorful leaves in the fall. Trees are 10-15' tall and wide. **Sungold** and **Moongold** require separate varieties for pollination. While not required, self-fertile varieties can have improved yield through cross-pollination.

Variety	Ripens	Hardiness	Stone	Flavor	Texture	Pollinator	Uses
Moongold	Late July	Zone 4	Free	Sweet	Juicy	Sungold	Fresh eating
Pioneer Chinese	Mid July	Zone 4	Cling	Sweet	Juicy	Self-fertile	Fresh eating
Scout	August	Zone 3	Free	Mild	Juicy	Self-fertile	Canning
Sungold	August	Zone 4	Free	Sweet	Firm	Moongold	Fresh eating
Westcot	Late July	Zone 3	Free	Sweet	Juicy	Self-fertile	All purpose

Pie Cherries

Sweet cherries generally are not hardy enough for our area. However, pie cherries do grow well in our climate. Pie cherries, also called tart or sour cherries, are self-fertile and do not require another variety nearby to pollinate blossoms. Tart cherry juice has recently gained popularity for its health benefits. A single Montmorency cherry tree can yield 40-50 quarts at maturity, enough for many pies or juice. Fruits are ½-1” in diameter and are tart to slightly sweet. As the cherries ripen, the trees should be protected with netting from birds, which love the ripening fruit. Jerry usually makes his first pie with very tart fruits around August 1st.

Cherry variety	Height	Ripens	Flavor	Fruit Color	Hardiness	Other
Evan’s Bali	15-20’	Late August	Sweeter	Dark Red	Zone 3	Hardy buds
Mesabi	10-14’	August	Sweeter	Bright Red	Zone 4	Bing cross
Meteor	10-14’	August	Sweeter	Bright Red	Zone 4	Genetic dwarf
Montmorency	12-18’	Late July	Tart	Dark Red	Zone 4	Very productive
North Star	8-10’	Late July	Tart	Red	Zone 4	Genetic dwarf
Sweet Cherry Pie	15’	July	Tart	Dark Red	Zone 3	Pie cherry, early

Pears

The following pear varieties have been developed for Northern climates. Pears ripen from late August (may be tart) to October in our area. Pears will be sweeter if they ripen on the tree, but should be harvested if temperature may drop below 25 degrees. You will need two different varieties for pollination. *Luscious* has sterile pollen and cannot be used as a pollinator. *Golden Spice* is our only cultivar resistant to fire blight. Except *Ure*, all our pears are grafted onto semi-dwarf rootstock, yielding mature trees 12-15’ in height and width. *Ure* is grafted on a standard, resulting in a 20-25’ size.

Pear Variety	Ripens	Hardiness	Flavor	Texture	Best Pollinator	Uses
Golden Spice	September	Zone 3	Mild	Firm	Ure	Canning
Luscious	Mid-Sept	Zone 4	Sweet	Firm	Parker	Dessert
Parker	August	Zone 3	Juicy	Tender	Patten	Eating Fresh
Patten	Mid-Sept	Zone 4	Juicy	Tender	Parker	Eating Fresh
Summer Crisp	Mid-Aug	Zone 3	Sweet	Crisp	Parker	Eating Fresh
Ure	Late-Aug	Zone 3	Juicy	Firm	Patten	Canning

Plums and Plum-cherries

American plum hybrids and cherry-plum hybrids need a pollinator to produce fruit. *Toka* and *Mount Royal* make the best pollinators for other plums. *Wild American Plums* will also work as pollinators. *Mount Royal*, *Stanley*, and other European plums are self-fertile but may produce more fruit with another variety nearby. Most plums ripen in late August except for *Stanley*, which ripens in early September, and *Mount Royal*, which ripens about Oct. 1st. For best growth, plant plums in an area protected from wind.

Plum Variety	Height	Fruit Size	Color	Stone	Hardiness	Uses
Alderman	10-15'	Large	Dark Red	Cling	Zone 4	Fresh
Black Ice	6-10'	Large	Black	Free	Zone 3	All
La Crescent	10-15'	Medium	Yellow	Free	Zone 4	Fresh, Jam
Mount Royal	8-12'	Small	Purple	Free	Zone 4	Dessert
Pipestone	10-15'	Large	Red	Cling	Zone 3	Fresh
Stanley Prune	8-12'	Medium	Blue	Free	Zone 5	Fresh, Jam
Toka	15-20'	Medium	Red	Cling	Zone 3	Pollinator

Peaches

Rare to our region, growing peach trees can provide backyard orchardists with a fun, challenging experiment. Like apricots, their beautiful blossoms are susceptible to frost. The long amount of time required for fruit ripening means that without special care, the trees do not go dormant early enough to survive our winter. We currently carry two varieties: *Reliance* and *Contender*.