**Fruit Tree Selection at its Best**

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Now is the time to plant fruit trees in the San Antonio area. Depending on your soil, you can improve the chances of successful home fruit production by preparing the soil or by use of a raised bed.

Apples are not easy to grow in the San Antonio area but it is possible especially if you have sand or river-bottom soil. The apples that survive best in our area are Anna and Dorsett Golden. Plant both selections so they can pollinate each other. Pass up red delicious apples. They require more cool weather than our climate can provide.

Peaches are somewhat easier to grow than apples but are still difficult in San Antonio proper. Hill country gardeners have more consistently cool weather to provide the necessary “chill hours” required so the peach can reload its chemistry. Elberta peaches will not produce a crop in the Central Texas area. They require considerably more cold winter each winter than we experience. My favorite peach varieties for our area are Florida King, Junegold, and La Feliciana. The early (low chill) peaches require less irrigation and insect and disease protection but the quality of later peaches such as La Feliciana is higher.

It is almost impossible to grow apples and peaches without a regular spray program that includes a fungicide and insecticide. Consult with plantanswers.com for recommended spray programs.

Plums are easier to grow than peaches. The most reliable plum in our area is Methley. It does best in a raised bed but does not require a pollinator. Santa Rosa is another good choice.

Pears are relatively easy to grow in our landscape. They do best on raised bed gardens with drip irrigation but often produce fruit without a regular spray program. Consider Le Conte, Kieffer or Orient pears. A pollinator is not required. The most popular pear variety is the Bartlett. It, however, is generally killed by fire blight, a bacterial disease if you try to grow it in San Antonio.

Figs are another fruit that is easy to grow in the area. They will tolerate native soils but do better on raised beds and in compost-enriched sand. Figs can survive dry conditions but require generous irrigation to produce a good crop. It helps to mulch the area over the fig root system with 6 inches of organic mulch. Select from Brown Turkey, Alma, Celesteo or Texas Everbearing.

For sandy soil, incorporate 6 inches of compost into an 8 by 8 foot area around the planting spot. The compost increases the water-holding capacity of the sand.

River bottom soil is usually deep, well-drained with good water holding capacity.

Most of us have heavy clay, caliche soil or rocky soil. The best way to grow most fruit trees in that situation is to use a raised bed. Plant the tree in an 8 foot by 8 foot area bordered by used railroad ties.

Fill the bed with landscape light commercial soil mix. It works especially well if you added soil to form a mound in the center of the bed.

Another key to successful fruit tree culture in our area is to irrigate the bed with drip irrigation. Each tree will eventually require four 2 gallon/minute emitters. Put the four emitters in from the beginning water a shorter period of time when the tree is small. Another option is to use 4 bubblers around each tree. The bubblers are mini sprinklers that can be turned off until they are needed.

Run the drip system twice a week for 1 hour during dry weather.

For detailed information on constructing and operating a drip irrigation system, obtain a copy of “Drip Gardening” authored by Tom Harris and Ron Casehill. It is available on thehillcountrygardener.com website.