Growing fruit trees and berries

Growing fruit trees or berries in your home garden is a rewarding experience, especially come harvest time. Planning your trees for a harvest all year round is a great way to ensure fresh fruits are always available.

Choosing your fruit or berry plant

Do your research before you buy!!
* Buy your plants from your local nursery, as they will only stock plants that can grow in your area.
* Make sure you are buying a fruit that you like to eat. It is your garden so you should be able to enjoy the produce.
* Check online or in fruit growing reference books if you need another variety for cross pollination, or if the variety you want to grow is self-fertile.
* Think about the space you have to grow fruit trees – read about the required spacing distances and mature height of the plant to ensure you don’t over crowd them. required.
* Make sure you have the right support and sunlight availability in the planting site and that you have prepared the soil with organic matter to ensure the healthy growth of your plant.

Planting Bare-rooted fruit trees

Bare rooted trees should be planted in winter and pruned back by around one-third. Dig a hole that is about three times the size of the root system and soil additives such as worm castings, compost or good quality vegetable soil mixes can be mixed through to improve the soil, particularly in areas with heavy clay. When planting, the soil level should not touch the graft (swelling area) at the bottom of the trunk. Firmly pack the soil back down and apply a complete fertiliser, then water the tree in. Watering should continue once or twice a week until summer.

Pruning deciduous fruit trees

Apple and pear trees can be pruned in winter, but stone fruit tree should be pruned in summer to prevent fungal diseases in the open cuts.

To start pruning you should first remove all branches that are dead, damaged or diseased. Then move on to reducing the crowding of branches by thinning, this will allow light and air flow around the tree. Remove branches that hang too low or touch the ground.

Next you need to prune to encourage fruit for the next season. To do this you need to understand on what branches your fruit tree produces fruit. Apples produce on wood that is two years or older whereas peaches and nectarine produce on wood that is new or first year growth. Others such as apricots, plums and cherries produce on first and second year wood. The aim with pruning is to remove branches that are no longer fruitful.

When pruning for growth cut back the branch to a healthy bud, select one that is pointing in the direction that you want growth. If you are removing dead or non-fruiting wood, cut back to a young
lateral that is growing in the desired direction. Use sharp secateurs to remove branches and loppers or a pruning saw to remove larger branches.

Cuts should be made so that the slope is running parallel with the bud, this will also ensure water will run off the cut away from the bud.

There are many good websites and fruit growing books available where you can learn the specifics of pruning for your particular fruit trees. Do some research before your start, but remember that if you make a mistake, the tree will grow back!

**Fruit trees and vines**

**Apples and pears**

*Pollination:* Apples and pears both require cross pollination to produce fruit. Some trees can be purchased that are partly self-fertile.

*Climate:* Apples can grow under a wide range of conditions, but like pears they thrive under a temperate to cool temperate climate.

*Soil preferences and roots:* Apples and pears will adapt to a wide pH range, pears prefer well drained soil but are able to tolerate wet soils for short periods of time. Pears have quite a deep root system, whereas apples have a shallow one and the roots may sucker. Watering is best done in large amounts when soil is dry.

*Size and pruning:* Apple trees can grow to 4x4m and pears to 4x6m if left unpruned. Both plants can be pruned for different designs including espalier and grown in pots. Pears and apples can both have multiple grafts on the one tree.

*Harvest time:* Pears can be harvested from February to March and apples from January to March. When fruits pull off the tree easily they are ready for harvest. Fruit should be thinned out for both fruits so the trees are not too heavy-laden and fruit develop nicely.

*Pests:* Pear and cherry slug is common on pear trees and codling moth on apple trees. To be healthy both plants will benefit from a complete fertiliser.

*Uses:* Pears and apples and both delicious fresh, dried in jams or sauces, cooking and in pies.

**Apricots, Peaches, Nectarines, Plums and Cherries**

*Pollination:* Apricots, nectarines and peaches purchased from nurseries are self fertile, though plums and cherries can require cross pollination.

*Climate:* Peaches, plums and nectarines prefer a warm to cool temperate climate, cherries enjoy
Gardens for Harvest

temperate and apricots prefer to have a dry spring.

**Soil preferences and roots:** All fruits are easily adaptable to a wide range of pH levels and need well-drained soil. Though apricots prefer slightly alkaline and nectarines, cherries and peaches prefer the soil slightly acidic. All fruits have a shallow root system, excluding cherries, which have a medium root system and will benefit from a bit more space to grow. All fruits will benefit from a good soaking of water when dry.

**Size and pruning:** Apricots trees will grow to 4 x 5 metres, cherries to 4m x 3m, nectarines to 3m x 3m, peaches to 3m x 3m, and plums to 4m x 4m. All trees can be pruned and shaped into different designs, including fans keeping the angles no larger than 45 degrees will help the tree hold its fruit. Minimal pruning is required for apricots, cherries and plums though peaches and nectarine should be pruned as they only fruit on 1 year old lateral branches. All but apricots will grow happily in pots. All trees can be purchased or made to have multiple grafts from different varieties or each other.

**Harvest time:** Nectarines, peaches and plums can be harvested from December to March, apricots from late November to late January and cherries from late October to mid January. When fruit pull off the tree with ease they are ready for harvesting. Thinning does not need to be performed on cherry trees, but all other trees should be if fruit is heavy laden.

**Pests:** Peaches and nectarines can commonly get peach leaf curl and cherries should be netted to prevent eating from birds. Spraying with a Bordeaux spray during winter will help prevent bacterial diseases and pear and cherry slug should be watched out for on cherry and plum trees.

**Uses:** All fruit can be used for glazing, drying, eating fresh, preserving, in cakes and jams.

**Kiwi fruits**

**Pollination:** Most kiwi fruits require cross-pollination to produce fruit, so purchasing a male and a female plant is important. Self fertile plants are available but less common.

**Climate:** A temperate to cool temperate climate.

**Soil preferences and roots:** A soil that is neutral to slightly acidic and free draining is preferable.

**Size and pruning:** Vines can be trained as espaliers for self-fertile varieties. Letting the vine grow over a trellis like a pergola, with allow for good cross pollination. Pinching out the growing tips in summer and then cutting back the last year’s growth in winter will ensure the plants are kept fruiting and neat.

**Planting:** Vines should be planted 3-5m apart in June to August or 2-3m apart is planting male and female plants. They do best in a warm sheltered area with a strong trellis such as a pergola to climb on.

**Harvest time:** Harvest takes place during April. The fruits should be harvested before the first frosts, which can occur as early as April. Store them in a cool dry place and the kiwi fruit will continue to
ripen until soft enough to eat. If no fruit has occurred this is an indication that the female grafted plant may have died.

**Pests:** Not many pests or diseases trouble the fruit but irregular watering or drought will cause leaves to fall off.

**Uses:** Can be eating fresh or used in fruit salads or to decorate tarts.

**Passionfruit**

**Pollination:** Passionfruit vines are self-fertile. Fruit is produced on new growth.

**Climate:** Prefers a dry autumn time for viability of pollen.

**Soil preferences and roots:** The vines have a shallow root system and should be mulched to keep them cool during the summer months.

**Size and pruning:** Always prune between spring and late summer, not during winter and this will make the plant susceptible to damage from the cold. Train lateral branches to a trellis when young and prune out old stems to encourage new growth, which fruiting occurs on.

**Harvest time:** Crops will be ready for harvest during winter. When passion fruit is completely purple and falling off the vine it is ripe, place the fruits in a sunny windowsill and let it ripen further and wait for the skin to turn wrinkly before eating.

**Pests:** Collar rot may occur due to dampness in the soil. If the passionfruit woodiness virus or cucumber mosaic virus occurs plants must be removed as there is not remedy. Passion vine hoppers suck sap from the stems and leaves causing fruit to shrivel and drop off.

**Uses:** Passionfruit is a common topping fro ice-cream, pavlova and fruit salads. It can also be made into jams or butter. The pulp can be frozen in ice cube trays and stored for later use.

**Berries**

**Blueberries**

**Pollination:** Blueberries are insect pollinated and mostly self fertile, but can produce more fruits if cross pollinated. Not all varieties blossom at the same month, to ensure cross pollination can occur buy varieties that flower at the same time.

**Climate:** The bushes can grow in warm to cool temperate climates there are different varieties to suit both climate types.

**Soil preferences and roots:** Acidic soil with a pH level of 4-5.5 will help the berries to thrive. If your garden has grown ornamental
plants such as azaleas or camellias then blueberries should be successful also. Soil also needs to be free draining.

**Size and pruning:** Plants can grow up to 2m in height. Blueberries should always be pruned in winter when the plant is still dormant. Remember to keep in mind that most fruit is produced on wood that is between one and three years old. Wood that is older than three years won’t produce fruit, so prune it out gradually. In the first two years very little pruning is needed. Just prune out anything that is damaged, dead, diseased or crossing over other branches. In the following years do that same but also remove non-fruitful wood, never prune out more than one quarter of the bush.

**Planting:** Bare-root plants can be planted between June and August and potted blueberries should be planted in winter or early spring. Only grow blueberries in acid soils, if your soil is not acid it may be easier to create a raised bed. Prepare the site by digging in composted sawdust or composted pine bark months in advance. Water the blueberry plant and remove it from the pot. Plants should be spaced out at a distance of 1.5m dig a hole 10cm larger than the pot on all sides. Place the plant in ensuring the root ball is level with the soil, fill in soil and press down. Water in and spread with a mulch of composted sawdust, leaf mould or pine bark.

**Harvest time:** Blueberries will have a different harvest period depending on the variety, early or late. Early varieties can be harvested as early as December and late varieties can be harvested until April. When it is time for harvest fruits should be deep blue in colour, have a powdery appearance and come easily off the bush. Harvest over a period to ensure all fruit are at their peak when picked.

**Pests:** Netting can be used to protect the berries from birds.

**Uses:** Blueberries can be eaten fresh or used in baking and preserves such as jams and cakes. Blueberries freeze well but will lose shape upon defrosting so will only be good for cooking or frozen drinks.

**Raspberries**

**Pollination:** Raspberries do not require cross pollination to produce fruit.

**Climate:** Raspberries prefer a temperate to cool temperate climate with protection from winds.

**Soil preferences and roots:** A slightly acidic pH is preferable with moist, well drained soil and heavy mulching. Raspberries have a medium root system with shallow roots collecting nutrients. Raspberries will sucker but this is important for fruit production. It is best to keep the soil moist at all times.

**Size and pruning:** The bushes can grow up to 1m by 1m in size. They are best planted for tidiness in a row along a fence line, which also provides support. They can also be grown in a container. Summer and autumn fruiting plants are pruned differently so it is important to know what varieties you have and where they are. Summer fruiting varieties grow fruit on last year’s canes and so only cut back the canes after they have fruited and been harvested or cut back the second year canes. Autumn
fruiting plants fruit on this year’s canes so cut back old canes annually or cut back canes after harvesting from them. An easy way to do this is by tagging the canes that have fruit on them for pruning.

**Planting:** Raspberry plants can be bought bare-rooted on as in pots. Prepare soil with manure and compost and set up trellises before planting. When planting spread the roots out at a depth of 8cm then pat the soil down and prune the top of all canes to a bud approximately 25cm from the ground. When new shoots grow in spring cut the main stem down to the ground and they will grow more strongly.

**Harvest time:** Raspberries plants can be purchased to bear fruit in summer or autumn. This means, depending on the type bought the harvest period will be December to January or January to March. Harvest raspberries when they are fully deep red in colour.

**Pests:** Powdery mildew and thrips can both be a problem for raspberries. Net ripening berries to protect from birds.

**Uses:** can be eaten fresh, preserved by freezing or drying or eaten in jams and cakes.

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**Strawberries**

**Pollination:** Strawberries do not require cross pollination to produce fruit.

**Climate:** A temperate to cool temperate climate is preferred but can be planted in tropical climates once the wet season has passed.

**Soil preferences and roots:** Strawberries prefer a slightly acidic pH level with well drained soil and protection from the wind. A site in full sun is beneficial but they will also survive with a few hours of shade. Small fibrous roots will remain close to the surface but roots will grow to about 30m deep.

**Size and pruning:** The bushes generally grow to about 30cm by 25cm. Strawberries don’t need traditional pruning but do need to be tidied at the end of the growing season. This will require removing old mulch, leaves and unwanted runners leaving at least 8cm of the crowns there as this will already be starting to grow for next year.

**Planting:** Strawberries can be planted from potted plants or bare-rooted. Summer-fruiting or perpetual varieties should be planted out in November or August. Bare-rooted plants can be planted in spring or summer and potted plants can be planted out in winter or spring. Dig in well-rotted manure and compost into the soil before planting, plant bushes 45cm apart spreading roots out over a small mound in the base of the planting hole. Ensure that the crown of the plant is level with the soil. Water the plants in immediately and regularly throughout the next few weeks, especially if the weather is dry or hot. Mulching or growing through plastic sheeting is essential to keep the berries clean for harvest time.
Harvest time: Summer fruit varieties can be harvested from November to January and perpetual fruiting plants from November to May. Strawberries do not harvest off the plant, so it is important to only harvest them when fully ripened in colour.

Propagating: When runners have formed on young plants lift them from the soil and but don’t cut them form the mother plant. Place a small pot into the ground close by filling it with good soil. Plant the runner, using a peg to hold it down if necessary and keep it moist. When roots have established, this will take about 4-6 weeks, cut the cord from the runner and the original plant and plant out in to the garden. Only take 4-5 runners per plant.

Pests: Birds and possums will eat the fruit so netting is essential for protection.

Uses: Strawberries can be eaten fresh or in baking, preserved in jams, cans or by freezing and drying. Frozen berries will lose shape once defrosted and therefore can only be used for cooking or frozen in drinks.

Helpful links

Planting a fruit tree:
Video: https://player.vimeo.com/video/96098928

Growing fruit:
Video: http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s4201458.htm

Pruning:
Video: http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s4210407.htm
Video (citrus): http://www.abc.net.au/local/videos/2013/03/20/3719712.htm