

Fruit Tree Care For The Rogue Valley



Growing your own fruit trees is a rewarding endeavor. Tree ripened fruit is so often hard to find yet it is so rewarding! With a few simple tips, you can be successful growing your own home orchard. Here are some things to help you along the way.

Planting Your Fruit Trees

Fruit trees need plenty of sunshine so choose a spot that has all day sun. Depending on the type and variety of fruit, your spacing will vary. Check in with us for more detailed information on spacing.

Good draining soil is required for most fruit trees. Pears do well in heavy, wet soils but they do better with better drainage. If you have heavy, or poor draining soil, plant your trees on a mound. Build up the area with topsoil and compost at least one foot above grade, and three feet in diameter. Be sure to amend the soil under the mound with compost as well to help the roots grow deeply into your native soil.

All fruit trees do best with soils rich in compost but don't forget to feed them as well. Compost is great for soil structure but characteristically low in nutrients. Check in with us for the best organic fertilizers for your fruit trees.

The Proper Care and Feeding of Fruit Trees

Once planted, regular watering is essential, especially in our typical hot, dry summers. Adding a drip system is ideal however if you don't have that available, build a berm around your tree that you can fill with water on a regular basis, or use water bags. When using a drip system, you can encourage deep watering by using Deep Drip watering stakes. These hollow stakes will help get the water to where the tree needs it.



Fruit trees need plenty of fertilizer. They work hard to bring you delicious fruit. The quality of the fruit is directly proportional to the quality of your care. Proper watering and feeding is important. We suggest quality organic fertilizer such as True Organics All Purpose Plant Food. Feed in spring just as the flowers are finished up and the leaves are beginning to show, and again in summer, around the first of July.



Pruning:

Fruit is made with sunshine. The leaves gather sunlight and convert it to sugars to build strong growth and fruit. Keeping a well balanced tree, with proper pruning will ensure that energy goes to producing quality fruit and less sucker growth. Timing is crucial in many cases. Stone fruits such as peaches and nectarines seem to do better with summer pruning (after harvest) while pome fruits such as apples and pears do best with dormant pruning (before booming). Stop in and we can discuss your pruning needs with you directly.

One thing that is really important is the sharpness of your pruning tools. Dull tools tear the cambium causing damage that is hard for the trees to recover from, and open up jagged areas for insects and fungal spores to attach. Sharpen well before pruning and more often as needed.



Fall Clean-up:

Leaves and debris left over from fall can be a source of overwintering insects and diseases. Cleaning under the trees is one of the best ways to avoid problems in spring. Clean up leftover fruit and fallen leaves. Do not compost these near your orchard. Keep weeds and grass away from the trees by hoeing them out and mulching.

Insect and Disease Control

Quality fruit production requires that we monitor and control the outbreak of damaging insects and diseases. Watering, feeding, pruning and cleaning our home orchards will help keep our trees strong, helping them fight off these problems. Fruiting trees put so much energy into the fruit that it can leave them vulnerable to such attacks. Spraying in the dormant season can help eliminate overwintering insects, insect eggs, fungal spores and bacteria. This is the safest time to spray as there is no fruit on the trees and the sprays are typically less toxic than many of the in-season sprays. When spraying, be sure to coat all plant surfaces with the spray. Insects, eggs and fungal spores can be very small. If you miss some, they can easily re-populate come spring. Before spraying be sure to read the label for mixture rates and safety guidelines.



Times, they are a-changin'! As we gain more knowledge about plants and their relationships with insects and diseases, we find better, safer ways to produce healthy fruit. There are several products on the market these days that will do the same thing using alternative ingredients. At Four Seasons Nursery, we strive to bring you the best we can find at a reasonable cost. We do NOT recommend the 'make it at home' remedies. These use products that are not listed for use for this purpose and many are not safe when mixed with other ingredients.

Dormant Spray Oil

Dormant spray oils work by coating insects and their eggs with a thin coat of oil. Insects breathe through their bodies so the oil works by suffocating them. Oils can cause damage to plants in warm weather so only use these sprays in the dormant season. Dormant oils control insects such as scale, mites, leaf rollers, pear psylla and whiteflies.

Dormant spray applications on all fruit trees should only be done during the dormant season when there is no foliage on the trees, and before the buds swell. This usually happens in March here in the Rogue Valley.



Copper Fungicide

Copper based fungicides work well to control fungi by inhibiting their ability to attach and be absorbed by plant tissues. This makes them great at preventing infections rather than curing an already diseased plant. Coverage is of utmost importance and it is better to spray more than you think you need rather than less. Timings, rates and controlled diseases widely differs from plant to plant so carefully read and follow the instructions on the label.



In Season Control

Controlling insects and diseases while there is fruit on the tree, can be done safely and effectively. Traps, organic solutions and procedures to discourage infestations are available.

Ladybugs and praying mantis make great predators for aphids, mites, and even beetles. They are fun to watch and great kid activities. As long as there is food for them, they will hang out in your garden, and many times return year after year.



Timing is critical with predators so be sure to check in with us early in the seasons so we can be sure you get your 'good' bugs early enough.

Expert Tips

Here are some great tips for the best fruit possible:

1. Start with great quality varieties, suited for our area. Not all stores sell the best varieties for the Rogue Valley. Choose from a local garden center (we hope you choose us, of course) for the best, up to date variety information.
2. Thin your fruit. Fruit trees can struggle with producing enough energy for all the fruit that forms. The tree is less concerned about the scrumptious flesh and more about the number of seeds it is producing. By thinning the fruit, the tree can focus more energy on the fruit itself, creating larger, higher sugar content fruit.
3. Water deeply but less frequently. Over-watering or shallow watering can cause the inside of the fruit to grow quicker than the skin causing the fruit to crack. Deep watering will allow the roots to dive deeper into the soil, taking advantage of more of the water that drains through, and allowing you to water less.
4. Harvest in the cool of the early morning. Farmers use cold water to reduce the temperature of the fruit as it is harvested, slowing the ripening down to get better shelf life. You can do the same thing just by harvesting while the temperatures are cool and keeping the fruit in a cool, dark area until you are ready to use or process them. If you can't harvest in the cool morning (or if the mornings aren't cool) have a large bucket of ice water handy to drop the fruit into until it cools down.
5. Mulch the tree in winter. Adding 2-3 inches of compost around the tree roots in winter to keep the roots more active in winter. The warmer roots will still provide essential moisture and nutrients to the dormant tree, decreasing the chance of damage from colder, dryer winters. Be sure to keep the area around the trunk of the tree clear so you don't damage the cambium (bark).

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