

Deciduous Fruit for Northeast Florida
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Have you ever considered using your landscape to produce more than shrubs, trees and pretty flowers? What about adding a few plants that produce fruit? Try your hand at farming food and make your landscape serve a dual purpose.

The first step is to find the best site in your landscape. An open sunny area is ideal with a minimum of six hours of direct light and good air circulation. If the site isn't in full sun, an area that receives morning sun is preferred to reduce potential disease problems. Before purchasing, research the mature size of the plant/variety and make sure there is adequate space.



Irrigation is a must during dry weather so make sure a water source is closeby. Soaker hoses or low volume irrigation are preferred because they keep water off the foliage thereby reducing diseases. Many fruit plants are susceptible to root diseases so soils must be well drained. Avoid low areas or spots where water puddles. Most fruit prefer a slightly acid soil pH around 6.0 to 6.5 with the exception of blueberries which grow best in soil pH of 4.0 to 5.3. Use a two to three inch layer of organic mulch like pine straw or pine bark to conserve water and help moderate soil temperatures. Pull mulch 2 to 3 inches away from the plant stems.

Next, select varieties that are adapted to our area. Deciduous fruit, also referred to as temperate fruit, have chilling requirements. Chilling hours equate to hours below 45°F and above 32°F while plants are dormant. The chilling hours vary from year to year, but normal chilling hours for our area are from 420 to 540. If 'TropicBeauty' peach with a 150 hours chilling unit requirement is planted in our area, the plant will bloom too early and flowers/fruit will potentially be damaged by freezes. Northern varieties like 'Fuji' and 'Gala' have a high chilling requirement so would not receive enough chilling hours to produce flowers and fruit in our area.

Purchase plants from Florida nurseries or at least nurseries in the southeastern U.S. They will be better adapted to our weather conditions and establish more easily. Here are some of the deciduous fruit and varieties recommended by the University of Florida for our area.

Apples: Varieties include 'Anna', 'Dorsett Golden', and 'Tropic Sweet'. Plant two varieties for pollination and good fruit set. Spacing is 15' by 20'.

Blackberries: Early trailing types (dewberries) include 'Flordagrind' and 'Oklawaha'; plant one of each for cross pollination. Later fruiting semi-erect

types are 'Brazos', 'Cheyenne', 'Comanche', and 'Cherokee', 'Navaho' and 'Arapaho'. Semi-erect types are self-fruitful so only one variety is needed. 'Navaho' and 'Arapaho' are thornless. Spacing is 5' by 12'.



Blueberries: Rabbiteye blueberries are native to Florida and better adapted to north Florida than Highbush varieties. Examples of early rabbiteye varieties are 'Beckyblue', 'Bonita', 'Woodard' and 'Climax'. Mid to late varieties are 'Brightwell', 'Powderblue', 'Premier' and 'Tifblue'. Plant two or more varieties within the group (early vs. mid to late) for cross pollination. Spacing is 6' by 12'.

Figs: Varieties include 'Brown Turkey', 'Celeste', 'Green Ischia', 'Alma' and 'Magnolia'. Spacing is 10' by 12'.

Muscadine Grapes: Bronze fruiting varieties are 'Fry*', 'Carlos', 'Welder', 'Tara', 'Summit*', 'Sweet Jenny*', 'Pam*', 'Granny Val', and 'Doreen'. Black fruiting varieties are 'Noble', 'Southern Home', 'Nesbitt', 'Black Beauty*', 'Black Fry*', 'Polyanna', and 'Supreme*'. Varieties with * are not self-fruitful and should be planted with at least one self-fruitful variety. Spacing is 15' by 10'.



Peaches, Plums and Nectarines: Medium chill varieties for our area include 'Flordadawn', 'Flordaking', 'Flordacrest', 'Gulfking', 'Gulfcrest', and 'Gulfprince'. The only nectarine is 'Suncoast'. Spacing is 15' by 20'. Newer plum varieties include the Gulf series: 'Gulf Ruby', 'Gulfbeauty', 'Gulfblaze' and 'Gulfrose' and all require a pollinator. Spacing is 10' by 20'.

Pear: Varieties are 'Flordahome', 'Pineapple' and 'Hood'. Use 'Hood' to pollinate the other two. Spacing is 20' by 20'.

Pecans: Varieties include 'Elliott', 'Stuart', 'Curtis', and 'Moreland'. 'Elliott' and 'Moreland' are considered to have higher nut quality and all are relatively resistant to scab. Plant 2 or more varieties for cross pollination. Spacing is 60' by 60'.

Persimmons: Persimmons are divided into anstringent and non astringent types. Astringent types include 'Hachiya', 'Saijo', 'Ramopan', 'Tanenashi', and 'Gailey'. Non-astringent types include 'Fuyu', 'Hanafuyu', 'Izu', 'Matsumoto Wase Fuyu', 'O'Gosho', 'Jiro', and 'Motsumoto'. Persimmons will set a heavier crop if a pollinator variety is used. Both 'Hachiya' and 'Gailey' are pollinator varieties so one of these should be planted with one of the other varieties. If 'Gailey' is used, resulting fruit on both trees will have some seeds. Spacing is 10' by 15'.

For more information on training and pruning deciduous fruit, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG345>. Also, a program on growing pecans will be held at the Duval County Extension Office on Saturday, February 21st from 9am to noon. Call 387-8850 to register.