

Cherry pie, peach cobbler, and apple crisp are just a few things that come to mind when fruit trees are mentioned. Makes my mouth water thinking about the baked goods made with fruit from your very own tree. It may sound simple to grow fruit trees, but there are a few rules to keep in mind when selecting the right fruit trees for your landscape.

The words location, location, location have never been more important than when selecting the site for your fruit trees. The performance of the fruit tree depends on how well their growing requirements are met. Fruit trees require full sun, at least 8 hours a day. They also require enough space between the trees so shading isn't an issue. Low lying areas, or frost pockets, should be avoided. These areas can allow cool air to settle, and increase the risk of frost or cold damage. South facing slopes with some earlier blooming fruit trees, like apricot, should also be avoided. These slopes warm up faster in the spring, which could mean an earlier bloom that is susceptible to frost damage.

After the perfect location is selected, cultivar selection is one of the most important tasks. Fruit tree cultivars should be selected based upon their vigor, productivity, climate adaptability, fruit quality, disease resistance, and personal preferences. All fruits are susceptible to insect pests and disease organisms. Some cultivars of apples and peaches are productive only under the careful use of a regular spray program using a fruit tree spray, a combination fungicide and insecticide product. Spraying at specific times throughout the growing season may be needed because many pests attack different fruits multiple times. If 'grocery store' quality fruit is your goal, be prepared to apply the fruit tree sprays routinely throughout the growing season to protect the fruit on those susceptible cultivars from pests. If less-than-perfect fruits are okay or resistant cultivars are selected, the spray schedule could be cut back or not needed at all.

Nothing beats biting into a crisp apple. In Nebraska, apples are commonly infected by cedar apple rust and apple scab. There are several options to preventing cedar apple rust in apples. One option is to remove all cedar trees within a 2 mile radius of the tree. Fungicide applications can also be applied to the cedars, apples, or both routinely when the fungal fruiting bodies are present. The last option, and the easiest when planting new trees, is to select a cultivar of apple that is resistant to those diseases. Some cultivars that are both apple scab and cedar apple rust resistant include Freedom, Liberty, and Enterprise. Also, keep in mind that some apple trees are not self-fruitful, meaning that they will need another cultivar of apple to act as a pollinator in order to get a good fruit crop.

Peaches in Nebraska are a fruit that everyone wants to grow. The sad part is that peaches are not long lived in Nebraska. In a commercial setting, a peach tree will live on average 8 years. They also take a couple of years before they become productive. Some common issues with peaches include peach tree borer, oozing bacterial canker, peach leaf curl, and late spring frost damage. If you decide to try a peach, Redhaven, Reliance, and Madison are the most commonly planted cultivars.

Everyone loves cherry pie. Tart, pie cherries can be successfully grown here in Nebraska. The sweet, Bing type, cherries on the other hand don't have a very long lifespan. Some of the more common cultivars of tart cherry include North Star, Balaton, and Montmorency.

Growing apricots is a gamble. Apricots bloom before our frost free date. The blooms are often hit with freezing temperatures or snow which damage the flowers and results in no fruit set. Most apricot growers are lucky to get fruit once every 4-5 years. If you want to try your luck, Harglow might be a variety for you.

Fruit trees can be grown successfully in Nebraska. Proper site and cultivar selection are just a few important considerations to keep in mind when picking out fruit trees for your landscape.

Elizabeth Killinger is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.killinger@unl.edu, her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.