

## **AND OTHER LOCAL FRUITS!**

Apples, Pears, Plums, Peaches, and even Crab Apples are dropping all over - just pick em up!

For centuries humans have picked from fruit trees, and the tradition is one of the most fun and reliable.

One tree can bear hundreds, even thousands of fruits in a year.

How many fruit trees do you think exist in Saugerties? You may have planted a couple, or know one or two in your neighborhood that aren't even harvested. How many fruit trees should we grow to establish a food source our children and grandchildren will thank us for?

This year we biked around scouting apple and pear trees. We asked the property owners if they minded us using their fruit for our food shares, and every single one was welcoming! A huge crate (5'x5'x5') was filled to the brim with apples from just 5 trees in Saugerties, and we spotted more than 20 from the road. Instead of paying to harvest from an orchard, bring your family over to your neighbor's tree, harvest a bushel and share the delicious pies, sauces, and ciders you make all winter long.

### **Planting**

It is important to plant fruit trees while they are dormant, but not when the roots could risk freezing - early spring and late fall are preferred.

Trees differ in sizes, fruit ripening times, tastes, and more - Do research on the different varieties of fruit trees and their needs before purchasing from a nursery or ordering online. Several companies offer a 1-year guarantee if your tree does not transplant well.

Remember to check - some varieties need a female and a male plant to produce fruit. Apples almost always are like this. Peaches on the other hand are usually self-fertile.

You can even plant fruit trees from branch clippings or seeds. Every fruit makes it easy to start without even buying new trees. Try sharing some peach and plum pits and some apple trimmings with your neighbors, and start a shared orchard in your lawns.

To plant - just dig a large hole, twice the size of the root ball, to allow the roots to spread out into loose soil.

Several sources recommend NOT fertilizing, so the young roots spread out and do not crowd around the trunk.

Planting from seed will differ from fruit to fruit, but for some, like apples, you are not guaranteed that the new plant will yield the same kind of apples as the parent.

### **Protecting**

It is important to protect young fruit trees until they are mature and strong from animal attacks and the elements.

For the first few years, keep a protective wrap or sheath around the skinny trunk to protect from deer or rabbits chomping at the base.

It is important to also protect the young branches because a hungry deer can gobble them all up in one sweep. We have used tall metal fencing run in a circle around the tree, and keep making the circle larger as the tree grows.

We also experimented with weaving branch clippings from other trees in forms around the young fruit trees, and have had moderate success deterring deer. The safest bet is to totally keep deer away with a good fence surrounding all your fruit trees.

Another idea is to plant sooo many that losing a few wouldn't hurt.

Be sure to water your newly planted fruit trees in spring. Water daily after planting to help the roots get started. Then water whenever there is drought for a week or more.

## Pruning

By cutting the upward suckers (new shoots) on a fruit tree, you can train the tree to grow more horizontally than vertically. This will keep the fruits nearer the ground, and also allow you to keep the tree smaller if you need the sun for your garden. Also, pruning can encourage new growth and lead a tree, which has not been producing fruit, to start again.

Good pruning advice can be found at: [www.gardening.cornell.edu/fruit/homefruit/3treefruit.pdf](http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/fruit/homefruit/3treefruit.pdf)

Some gardeners prefer Not to prune at all. Letting the trees run their course and grow freely, large and plentiful. Some of the apple trees we harvested from in Saugerties had not been pruned in many years, if ever, and were gigantic and full of fruit. We found many interesting methods for getting the fruit down - everything from climbing and shaking the branches, to knocking them off with rakes. We recommend planting plenty of fruit trees and trying pruning some and letting others go, and future generations can prune if they want to... or maybe just climb and shake.

## Fruit Tree Guilds

The idea of fruit tree guilds is simple. Trees grow as part of ecosystems. So planting fruit trees can actually be seen as planting part of an ecosystem. The guild is the many possibilities for other plants that, if planted with the fruit tree, will benefit the tree, and benefit from it.

There are infinite plant relationships to consider, but some of the basic ones are the root depths, plant's proximity, shading capabilities, ability to attract or deter insects, ability to support birds or other wildlife, and their nutrient uses or sharing capabilities.

Here's an example:

In this guild an apple tree is in the middle. The dill and fennel are used as insectary plants, meaning they repel insects that may damage the apple tree. The bulbs (which are things like daffodils and garlic chives) suppress grass from growing. Clover will also suppress grass and add nitrogen to the soil that the tree will need. The artichoke and comfrey are used as mulch. You simply cut them when they are big enough and lay the leaves around the tree.

Although, many of the plants in any guild can be interchanged with others, that would act in different ways, you could just start by planting this guild in your lawn. I don't think there are any fruit trees that would benefit from being surrounded by a nutrient stealing grass lawn; so check out some more fruit tree guilds for beneficial companions to fruit trees.

## Harvest time and Processing

Different fruits and varieties ripen at all different moments in summer through late fall. When a

peach is ready it tastes sublime. A week later it will be mealy. So watch, feel, smell, and taste to be right on top of your fruit.

Some kinds can wait. Apples and pears usually ripen over a longer season, progressing from tough and tart to soft and sweet. And some varieties even stay good on the tree until the first frosts. Be sure to get them down before that though, or they could be damaged, and unable to store for winter. Fruits harvested late fall are ideal for winter storage because your root cellar is already nice and cold.

That brings us to storing fruit. Apples and pears are easiest. Only store undamaged fruit at 32-35 degrees F and 80 percent humidity - a wet and cold root cellar or basement. Keep them in small batches because, like potatoes, a bad one in the middle of a pile can spoil the rest. Check them often and eat the ones getting soft, leaving the crisp ones for later.

At 32 degrees, the apples will probably last till July or later. Some people wrap apples in newspaper, or put them in boxes of damp sawdust or sand to protect the skin from oxygen, which keep them crisp longer.

Plenty to do with bruised fruit too! Jams, canned fruits, frozen, dehydrated, fruit leather, cider, hard cider, sauces, pies!!!

You can even make your own apple cider vinegar, which is super nutritious in tiny amounts and safer for cleaning than any chemical products.

## Sharing fruit

The beauty of fruit is that we have so much already, and we can start sharing right away!

Right now - we should be harvesting, processing, baking and enjoying the autumn full of fruit with our families and neighbors. Really appreciating the beauty and abundance of fruit trees.

And in order to keep this abundance going and increase it for the future, keep planting more fruit trees and guilds in our lawns, parks, schools, downtown and everywhere!