

There's Always Room for Something Sweet!

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by Annie Plowman

No meal feels complete until you've have a little something sweet. It doesn't have to be big, but something. Fruit is such a wonderful choice. It seems an odd time to talk about fruit because we think of spring and summer harvests but, fruit requires some advance planning. The longer you put it off, the longer you have to wait for those luscious home grown fruits. If your family digs veggies, just wait until you are growing your own fruit! We all must have a picture in our family photo album... that special little somebody with a face full of berries!

Now is a great time to plant strawberries for a spring harvest. That's right! There are strawberries in the nurseries. A couple of good ones to try are the Quinalt or Sequoia. For now, pick off the blossoms. It's still a little too early. You can do a lot of research about what is sweetest etcetera but my thinking, is anything you grow yourself is going to be really tasty and far better than what you can get in the store. So, plant what's available now. I wouldn't worry too much about varieties.

Good Strawberry link... <http://groups.ucanr.org/cagardenweb/files/66678.pdf>

Another fun choice (and super healthful) is blueberries. Blueberries can do quite well in a pot and have pretty fall color. Blueberries like an acidic planting mix so, buy a soil mix that is suitable for azaleas. They also like an acidic fertilizer. There are a few other things to think about with blueberries. Their roots grow close to the surface so, don't plan on doing much digging in the area around the plant. They won't like that.

With blueberries, experts recommend that you limit the amount of branches to an amount equal to the age of the plant. It is also recommended that the blooms be removed the first year to prevent the plant from overproducing. The result of an over productive plant could be much smaller berries and eventually a disappointing plant. Yes... I know that's tough. Patience pays off and does make a difference. If you want to bend the rules, maybe get several plants and bend the rules on one of them. I know how hard it is to wait and even harder to ask your kids to wait.

growing link ... <http://ucee.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/5842/25993.pdf>

varieties link ... <http://www.mastergardeners.org/picks/bluevar.html>

If you have a lot of room, think about blackberries and raspberries too. Those will soon be available at many nurseries. They require a good amount of space and a sunny location.

This is also an ideal time to plant fruit trees. It's sometimes hard to wrap our minds around planting a tree when it doesn't look it's best but, it's actually a great time. Some people do a lot of research before deciding on their trees only to find that the local nursery doesn't carry it. Listen to the local experts and don't try too hard to purchase a tree that can't be found in any local nursery. If it can't be found, there is probably a very good reason. They have done their homework. They know what works for your area. They also know what is popular and what has the best success. It might not be a great idea to try to grow the same apple your aunt grows in Washington but, there is probably another variety suitable for your area.

I don't have a big yard so, I was happy to find a multiple graft tree that has four of my favorite fruits growing on the same tree. If you don't have a lot of space that might work for you. Still looking for space? The fruiting trees have very attractive blossoms. You'll need sun, so if the sun is limited to the front yard, I say plant there!

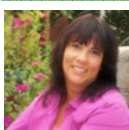
A few more things to think about is pruning and care. There are specific things you need to do to have a healthy and productive fruit tree. It's important and it's not that much work. There's just a few things to do at selected times of the year. Stone fruit (fruit with pits) needs to be dormant sprayed. (The dormant spraying period starts next month and continues for the next few months.) Pruning to encourage branching is important. Fertilization is also important. The UC Davis website has some great info on those topics and a good nursery professional should also be able to give you a bounty of information on the topics. More links.....

pruning <http://homeorchard.ucdavis.edu/general-pruning.html> and

spraying <http://ucee.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/2557/8210.pdf>

One last thing... You might be reading about sandy-well-drained soil. Be careful with that. Most of us have heavy clay. If you start adding sand to clay you can end up with something like concrete. Well-drained-soil rich in organic matter is important. A good quality compost and organic fertilizer is your friend.

Happy Planting!



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