

Pensacola News Journal  
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### **Fruit Trees Arriving, So Choose the Best**

Fruit trees begin arriving at local nurseries and garden centers during this month, and there are some choices that gardeners should make before the purchase. The most important consideration is the choice of varieties that match up with our special climatic zone.

Most of the northern Gulf Coast is located in plant hardiness zone 8a or 8b, which means that we receive an average of 500 to 600 chilling units during the dormant season. Chilling units are defined as the number of hours below 45 degrees F. that are required to induce the tree to break dormancy and produce flowers. Since many of the fruit plants are bred for specific climatic zones and corresponding chill hours, the varieties must closely match the average local winter conditions.

This is one of the reasons that I cannot recommend some of the better known varieties of fruit trees. Elberta peach, for example, requires a minimum of 850 chilling units before it can properly break dormancy, flower and produce fruit. Our area of the country would rarely, if ever meet this requirement. On the other hand, the use of a central Florida variety would also result in no fruit. Flordadawn is a 300 hour peach and, if planted in northern Florida, would likely have accumulated enough chill units to flower in January. Due to its flowering too early, the blossoms would be killed by freezes.

Following is a partial list of fruit varieties for our area. You will notice right away that some well known varieties are not included because of chilling unit considerations.

There are only two apple varieties - Anna and Dorsett Golden. At least one of each variety should be included in a planting in order to ensure good pollination.

Figs: Brown Turkey, Celeste, Green Ischia, Alma and Magnolia. Blackberry: Brazos, Cheyenne, Flordagrind, Oklawaha, Comanche and Cherokee. Arapaho and

Navaho are two thornless varieties that can be grown in North Florida. Peaches include June Gold, GlordaRio, Flordacrest and Flordaglobe. Recommended pecans are Desirable, Elliott, Stuart, Curtis and Moreland.

The rabbiteye blueberry is native to the northern Gulf Coast, and is one of our best adapted fruits. Recommended varieties include Climax, Woodard, Tifblue, Powderblue, and Briteblue. Climax and Woodard flower at the same time and both should be included in a planting for good pollination. Likewise, Tifblue, Powderblue and Briteblue flower at the same time, so at least two of these varieties should be planted together.

Pears are relatively easy to grow if varieties are carefully chosen. Bartlett pears, though delicious, are not included on our list because of their susceptibility to disease. Recommended varieties include Flordahome, Pineapple, Baldwin, Tenn, Ayers, Hood Orient and Carnes.

Transplanted northerners often crave, and wish to grow raspberries in this area. Unfortunately, Dorman Red is the only raspberry worthy of trial, and it lacks the typical raspberry flavor.

There are several other kinds of fruits that can be grown here. Anyone who is contemplating an orchard, or even a few fruit plants in the yard should get a complete list of recommended varieties for north Florida. Contact your local Florida Extension Office and ask for "Deciduous Fruit for North Florida" - Circular 611.

**Question of the Week:** I have purchased an orange and a grapefruit tree. Both are in 3 gallon containers. Can I plant them now?

**Answer:** Oranges and grapefruits are too cold sensitive to be grown in our area, except in very protected places inland and in areas near the coast. If you wish to experiment anyway, keep them in the containers and protected from freezes until they can be spring planted.

In general, the northwest Florida counties are limited as to the kinds of citrus that we can grow because of winter temperatures. Satsuma tangerines and kumquats are dependable if provided with protection during extremely cold periods.