

Fruit Tree Suggestions

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Now, the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District doesn't sell fruit trees per say (we do sell fruit producing shrubs like sandcherry, chokecherries, buffaloberry, and aronia berry) but this time of year I get questions about what fruit trees to plant for home orchards. There are so many factors in deciding what species or varieties to plant. Do you want just apples? Do you desire to plant some peach trees? Oh! How about some cherry trees? And don't forget some pear trees!

When picking out your trees, remember that northeast Nebraska is in Growing Zone 5, but I like to go with fruit trees that will do well in Zone 4 for extra hardiness. That is why many of the varieties on these lists are from the University of Minnesota.

APPLES

Apples are divided into three categories: Early Season, Mid-Season, and Late Season. Now, the problem with Early Season Apples is that they bloom earlier and if we have a late frost they can be damaged and not able to produce fruit that year. Then again, if you want apples early in the season, then you can look at Early Season Apples.

Also, with apples, you can't expect to get all the same varieties and they will produce. For example, a Honeycrisp and a Honeycrisp will not pollinate each other but a Honeycrisp and a Golden Delicious or Red Delicious will be able to cross and produce apples. Sounds weird doesn't it? Now, the best website that I have found to find out what will cross with each other is www.starkbros.com and I am not promoting their product(s), but you can type in a variety (most varieties) of apple and it will come out with what other varieties will pollinate or cross with the one you typed in.

Here are a few suggestions along with a brief description of each and you will notice that I have broken them down into those three categories:

Early Season Apples

Pristine An early summer apple! Tree bears crops of medium to large fruit with a sweet-tart taste and a crisp, breaking flesh. Fruit features canary-yellow skin with a slight pink blush. Excellent for cooking, sauce, and eating fresh. Introduced circa 1995. Disease-resistant to scab, powdery mildew, fire blight, and cedar-apple rust. Ripens in mid-July.

SweeTango Juice and sweet with hints of fall spices, and deep red coloration over a yellow breaking background. This apple's flavor, balanced by vibrant acidity, inherited the crisp texture of 'Honeycrisp' and the juiciness of 'Zestar!®'. Ripens in early September.

Zestar Large, crunchy, juicy red fruit with a sprightly sweet-tart flavor. Excellent for both fresh eating and cooking. The fruit will store for 6 to 8 weeks. Tree is vigorous, upright and very susceptible to apple scab. Introduced in 1999. Ripens late August to early September.

Snow Apple Pleasantly fragrant! Tree bears crops of round, medium-sized fruit with ruby-red over green skin and a snow white flesh. Exceptional flavor for fresh eating, juice, and cider. Keeps well in proper storage. Blooms late to avoid frost. Antique variety, originates from Quebec, Canada, circa 18th century. Believed to be a parent of McIntosh. Cold-hardy. Ripens in early September.

Mid-Season Apples

Honeycrisp Large, dappled red fruit with a well-balanced flavor, outstanding crispness and juiciness. Best for fresh eating and salads as the flesh is slow to brown. Tree has low to medium vigor and excellent scab resistance. Fruit will easily store 7 or more months, a benefit for small commercial growers. Ripens late September. By far University of Minnesota's most popular apple.

Jonafree A carefree Jonathan apple tree. This vigorous variety is disease-resistant to apple scab and less susceptible to diseases, like mildew, rust, and blight, than other Jonathans. Bears heavy crops of fruit with low-acid Jonathan flavor. Ripens in mid-September.

Sweet Sixteen Crisp and juicy with an exotic yellow flesh and a very sweet, unusual sugar cane or spicy cherry candy flavor. The fruit stores for 5 to 8 weeks. Tree is very vigorous and fruit may be subject to premature drops. Introduced in 1977. Ripens mid- to late September.

CrimsonCrisp A fresh-eating favorite! These excellent apples keep for 4-6 months in proper storage. Deep crimson skin covers sweet, crisp, subacid yellow flesh. Tree is upright with a round canopy. Introduced circa 2004. Disease-resistant to apple scab. Ripens early to mid-September.

Late Season Apples

Enterprise Firm and crisp, with a spicy aroma and mild tartness. Extremely disease-resistant to apple scab, cedar apple rust and fire blight; moderate resistance to powdery mildew. Keeps 5-6 months if refrigerated. Introduced circa 1993. Cold-hardy. Ripens in mid-October.

Fireside Very large fruit with sweet flavor and fine-grained flesh good for fresh eating, salad, and baked apples. Tree is vigorous and weeping. Introduced in 1943. Ripens mid-October.

GoldRush Organic growers' choice. This dessert-apple tree is disease-resistant to apple scab and powdery mildew. Fruit has a tart, tangy flavor that sweetens with age. Excellent fresh or in pies and crisps. Introduced circa 1993. Ripens in mid- to late-October.

Pink Lady A divine dessert apple. This tree bears medium-size fruit with rich yellow skin blushed with pink. Apples have a unique flavor — the first bite is tart, followed by just the right amount of sweet. Also makes a great addition or stand-alone apple in pies! Ripens in late October.

WineCrisp Great flavor and easy to grow. This deep-red fruit is everything you want in a dessert apple — sweet, juicy and firm. Also great for baking. Tree is ideal for northern gardens! Disease-resistant to scab, fire blight, and powdery mildew. Fruit stores up to nine months. Originates in Illinois circa 1968. Cold-hardy. Ripens in mid-October.

PEARS

Pears are like apples; different varieties are often needed to cross pollinate with each other. It has been suggested that you buy 2 of one variety of pear and 2 of another variety of pear. Here are a few varieties to consider, but there are more varieties available!

Bartlett The #1 pear worldwide! First introduced in 1797, this multi-purpose pear is a long-standing favorite of orchard growers and fruit gardeners alike. Starts bearing at a young age and is very productive. Fruit features a smooth, firm texture and a juicy, spicy taste. Originally called Williams Pear.

Moonglow Big, bold, blushed fruit. This beautiful, Bartlett-type pear is soft and juicy without being mushy. The tree is disease-resistant to fire blight and will bear fruit for years. A strong pollinator for other pear varieties. Originates from Maryland, introduced in 1960. Ripens in mid-August.

Seckel Small dessert pears that are super-sweet with a hint of spice. Often used in cooking and canning, but also enjoyed fresh. Tree is disease-resistant to fire-blight. Originates around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the 1700s. Ripens in mid-September.

Summercrisp Sweet flavored, crisp fruit. 2 1/2–3" in diameter and 3–4" long. Blooms early May. Fruit harvested when crisp, green with a red blush, and may be stored up to two months. Hardest pear at University of Minnesota.

CHERRIES (SWEET)

Starkrimson Sweet Cherry An easy way to get your summer cherry fix. This tree is compact and exceptionally productive – great for growing in smaller spaces! Produces generous clusters of firm, meaty cherries with a bright, sweet taste. Delicious fresh or in pies, crisps, and salads. Heavy crops mean you'll harvest enough cherries to enjoy every way you love them. Resists cracking. Developed in Summerland, British Columbia and introduced in 1994. Ripens in late June. Self-pollinating.

Whitegold Sweet Cherry A sweet cross with great looks and taste. This heavy-cropping tree is the offspring of Emperor Francis and Stella parents. Tree bears gorgeous yellow-blushed-red sweet cherries that mature in mid cherry-season. Disease-resistant to brown rot, bacterial canker, and black knot. Resists cracking. Developed in Geneva, New York, introduced circa 2003. Ripens in mid June.

CHERRIES (TART/SOUR)

Meteor Semidwarf (10-14'). Hardy, vigorous, pie cherry tree with large bright red fruit. No cross-pollination needed.

Montmorency The most popular cherry in the USA! This compact tree bears armloads of ripe, tangy, red cherries, which make mouthwatering, succulent pies and cobblers. Originates from Montmorency Valley, France circa 1600s, introduced to the U.S. in the 1800s. Cold-hardy. Ripens in mid-June. Self-pollinating.

NorthStar A heavy producer. The number of deliciously tart cherries from one of these trees will amaze you. The fruit is perfect for juice or any number of dessert recipes. The sturdy, vase-shaped tree is a beauty in the landscape. Bears just a few years after planting. Disease-resistant to brown rot and leaf spot. Developed by the University of Minnesota, introduced in 1950. Cold-hardy. Ripens in mid-June. Self-pollinating.

PEACHES

Peaches don't usually need another tree to pollinate, but with that said, it is best to plant two. Now, in Nebraska we have a nasty Peach Borer and no insecticide can really control this pest, so it is best that once your peach trees reach maturity, you start the next generation by planting two more trees. I will talk more about fruit tree insects and diseases in a later article for Tree-Mendous Tuesdays.

Hale Haven One of the best canning peaches! This large fruit is excellent for fresh-eating and canning a breeze, so you can enjoy homegrown peaches all year round. Fruit has an attractive yellow skin blushed with a red cheek and firm, juicy flesh complete with a rich sweet taste. Tree is reliably productive. Originates from South Haven, Michigan in 1924, introduced in 1932. Freestone. Ripens in early September. Self-pollinating.

Redhaven A blue-ribbon, all-purpose peach. Luscious, top-quality fruit is great as a fresh snack or for canning and freezing. Enjoy bushels of large peaches with almost fuzzless skin over firm, creamy textured yellow flesh. Tree is heavy-bearing and easy to grow and maintain. Blooms late to avoid spring frosts. Branches have a spreading nature. Disease-resistant to leaf spot. Freestone. Originates from South Haven, Michigan in 1930, introduced in 1940. Ripens in late July. Self-pollinating.

Reliance Our hardiest peach tree. This tree produces a heavy crop of fruit as far north as Canada, even after frigid winters. Perfect for northern fruit gardens! Fruit is medium-to-large with a sweet, peachy flavor. Features a flush of pink flowers in early spring. Originates from New Hampshire in 1964. Cold-hardy. Freestone. Ripens in early August. Self-pollinating.

PLUMS

For the most part, plums are self-pollinating, but again it is best to plant 2 – 3 or more of these trees or shrubs. If you start to see large black growths on limbs, cut them out as soon as you can and burn them! This is Black Knot and it is a deadly disease that can wipe out not only your plums but other fruit trees.

Stanley Prune-Plum The gold standard for prunes. This variety produces abundant crops of oval-shaped fruit with deep purple skin and sweet golden flesh. Tastes great when picked fresh or when dried or canned. Perfect for gardeners in the Northeast, Midwest, and upper South. Freestone. Developed in Geneva, New York in 1926. Ripens in early September. Self-pollinating.

Superior A plum tree for northern gardens. This robust tree produces abundant crops of fire-red fruit with sweet, juicy, yellow flesh. Dessert plums like these are ideal for eating fresh off the tree. Originates from University of Minnesota in 1933. Cold-hardy. Clingstone. Ripens in August.

So, what varieties have you tried and had success with that isn't on this list? Let me know and send me an email at pbergstrom@lenrd.org. Did you have trouble with a species? Again, let me know. This way I can add or subtract to my lists of fruit trees for northeast Nebraska and get some ideas for my own fruit orchard that my brother and I will be starting this summer out at the farm.

Do you want more information about other fruit producing trees or shrubs? Let me know and I will do my homework and come up with a list of varieties for northeast Nebraska. In the next few weeks I will be talking about pruning fruit trees and the diseases/insects of fruit trees.

SOURCES:

University of Minnesota: <https://mnhardy.umn.edu/>

Stark Brother's Nursery: www.starkbros.com



Honeycrisp Apples ready for harvest. Picture from Stark Brother's Nursery.



Moonglow Pear. Picture from Stark Brother's Nursery.



Don't they look juicy! These are Redhaven Peaches. Picture from Stark Brother's Nursery.



Superior Plum getting ready for picking. Picture from University of Minnesota.



Fruit Blooms In Spring! What a beautiful site! Picture from GrowOrganic.com.