

Creating the right environment:

Wind shelter

Before your fruit trees go in, you **must have your shelter up**. Trees grown in the blast of wind will struggle and be unproductive. Get some wind cloth or hessian up while you wait for your shelter to grow.

Maximise your edible garden and grow a fruiting wind shelter eg: feijoas, hazelnuts, olives, blackcurrants. They will not fruit as well as normal since they are growing closer together and in the wind.

Biodiversity

The health of an organic orchard depends on having a biodiverse garden – ie a wide range of herbs and flowers to feed and house a wide range of beneficial insects. Grow these as an understorey to your trees.

Following is a list of some of my favourite orchard companions.....

To attract and feed beneficials (including bees)

Chicory, borage, buckwheat, phacelia, bergamot, goldenrod, dahlia, lemonbalm, cow parsley, catmint, yarrow, salvias (esp pineapple sage), clover, violets, umbelliferae, hyssop, sedum, daisies, alyssum, wallflowers, lavender.

For fruit tree health

Comfrey, clover, yarrow, chamomile, tansy,

To repel pests

Tansy, salvia, hellebores, mustard, marigolds, horseradish (contained!) lavender, rosemary, chrysanthemum, fennel, yarrow, southernwood, marigolds, mustard, chives, peppermint (contained) geranium, umbelliferae, nasturtium,

Fruit Tree companions:

Pears - phacelia, comfrey, spring bulbs, penny royal, nasturtium

Apples - comfrey, chives, peppermint geranium, yarrow, clover, parsnip

Plums – tansy, marigolds, comfrey, spring bulbs, nasturtium, yarrow, bunching onions

Peach – thyme, tansy, chives, alfalfa, chamomile

Apricot – chamomile, hyssop, violets, forget me nots, phacelia

Almond – hyssop, chamomile, thyme, chives, tansy, alfalfa

Fig – oregano, thyme, marjoram

Citrus – violets

Strawberries – lettuces, borage

DESIGN FOR FRUIT TREES IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Courtesy of the Green Gardener



Begin with a plan!

You need to draw a plan to make sure that the trees you want to grow match the growing conditions at your place. A plan will ensure you are not seduced by every exciting fruit tree in the garden centre! When you have a plan you know exactly what you want when you're buying trees. Making a plan gives you the opportunity to really maximise your space and fit as many edible plants in as possible.

Start off with your wish list. Think about what fruits you want to eat and preserve. Next draw a sketch of your section – mark in as many details about your climate and soil as you can. This is a great chance to get to know your section better e.g.: show where wind blows, where the soil is dry or wet or frosty, where the soil is poor or rich, where the sun shines – morning, midday, afternoon, where the water flows – in and out, where north is...

Based in your observations above mark in the climates around your house that match the following descriptions:

Suits deciduous trees (eg: apples, pears, plums, peaches, apricots, nectarines, cherries) These trees can cope with some exposure. They need good sun for ripening and airflow for health. Plums and pears can handle heavy soils. Peaches, apricots and nectarines need free draining soils, and enjoy a bit of breeze.

Suits Mediterranean trees (eg: figs, grapes, olives) These need hot summers and dry autumns, and will cope in dry, bony soils as long as they are irrigated and mulched until they get established.

Subtropical trees (eg:tamarillo, pepino, guavas) While these are often on sale at local garden centres, they actually have a very low chance of success in Lower Hutt, as they are frost sensitive.

Suits Citrus trees These grow well with subtropical conditions—they need a hot sunny sheltered moist position. They are very hungry!

Suits Berries These need some winter chill to set fruit, good summer sun and wind shelter.

Other key information – Does your tree need a pollinator or not?

Some trees eg: peaches are self fertile; some need another tree to pollinate eg: apples. This is vital information.

Also think about maximising your space by using existing structures and trees for fruiting vines to climb over; using existing walls and fences for espalier; and growing edible hedges.

Choosing the Right Rootstock:

The next most important factor to get right is choosing the right rootstock. The rootstock is very important because it determines how big the tree is going to get and what soils the tree will thrive in.

On an urban section you should be choosing the smaller rootstocks.

Here is a list of suitable smaller rootstocks:

Apples:

Dwarf rootstocks (M9)– for 2m trees. Dwarf trees are a great way to fit many fruit trees onto a smaller section. Even though they are small they still fruit abundantly, but be aware they are vulnerable to wind and breakages from heavy crops, so they will need a sheltered spot and permanent stakes. Their shallow roots need irrigation and mulch – and makes them unsuitable for sandy soils. They won't live as long as bigger trees maybe 30 years as opposed to 150!

MM26 – the next size up! Can cope with a wide range of soils, but not waterlogging. Will only need staking if in a windy place.

MM106 – for 4m trees. These must have free draining soil to do well. Strong frame gives it an advantage over dwarf rootstock in exposed places, can be kept small with pruning.

Northern Spy – for 4m- 6m trees. Will cope if you have heavy soils. Good pruning and/ or espalier will make sure it keeps to a convenient height.

Pears:

Quince rootstock – for 3m trees. Prefers heavier, fertile soils.

Apricots, plums, peaches, nectarine:

Use a plum rootstock for heavier soils – this grows 4 – 6 m trees; or peach rootstock for dry bony soils – this is more vigorous growing a 5 -8m tree. These are all big trees for an urban backyard, but you can fit them in with clever pruning. Prune your plums as either standards or fans, and the others as fans preferably against a north facing wall.

Cherries:

Tangshe rootstock for 4m trees. Prune to a Fan or standard to fit your urban section.

Citrus:

Use smaller rootstocks such as a flying dragon for 2.5m trees. These cost more money but are well worth it.