A close-up photograph of a raspberry bush. Several large, dark blackberries are in focus, showing their characteristic bumpy texture. Interspersed among them are some bright red raspberries. The background is filled with green, serrated leaves. A yellow curved line separates the top pink section from the bottom pink section.

The Fruit Garden

Guide to Tree & Bush Fruit

growing your own fruit



There has never been a better time to grow fruit. Many years of breeding has produced trees and bushes that take up less room, are resistant to some of the more damaging diseases, and give higher yields.

Many fruit bearers add a lot to the garden aesthetically too, with blossom in spring and striking foliage in the autumn, plus the fruits that look and taste great! A 'potager' type plot can incorporate fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers to provide for all your needs.

pruning The requirements will depend on what kind of fruit bush or tree you are growing, but generally the idea is to keep the bush or tree open for air to circulate and allow the sun to get to the fruits to ripen them. It is also to keep a good shape, and for training into cordon, espalier or fan shape it's essential.

pollination Some fruit types are self fertile and will not need another compatible tree nearby to help with pollination, others are not, with these you will need to be able to have a companion for this to occur. Some very early blossoming types such as peaches, nectarines, apricots and very early pears flower when there are not many insects about. They may need a hand with the help of a soft artists brush, or cotton wool to move pollen from flower to flower.

soil Prepare the soil for your fruit a few weeks before planting by digging over well and incorporating organic matter. For an acid loving plant like the blueberry this will be pine chips, or suitable compost to keep up the acidity in the ground. If your soil is too alkaline a large container of ericaceous compost is your best bet. Free draining soil is a common requirement as most prefer to be moist but not soggy.

mulching It is a good idea to apply a thick mulch of organic matter in spring. This will help to keep weeds down and conserve moisture. Keep the mulch away from the stems or trunks of the trees, and if you have an acid loving plant, like a blueberry, go for a suitable mulch such as ericaceous compost.

feeding All types of fruit benefit from feeding in early spring. Different fruit types have different needs so make sure you choose one that is suitable. For example, plums require a higher nitrogen content, and sweet and sour cherries have slightly different requirements. There are huge resources of information available, in books, on the web, or even at your local nursery or garden centre.



Contact details:

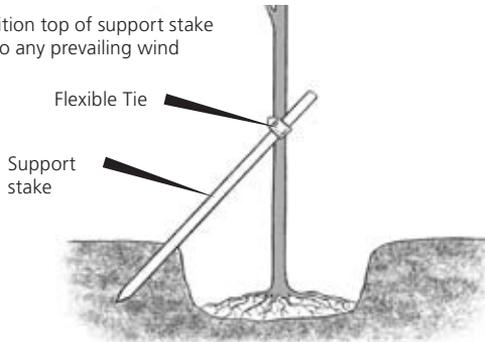
Samuel Dobie & Son, Long Road, Paignton, Devon TQ4 7SX
Tel: 01803 696411
www.dobies.co.uk

giving support

stake

Both tree and some soft fruit types will require support. Your tree fruit will need to have a good solid stake put in place when the tree is planted. Many trees have shallow root systems, a good quality stake prevents wind rock and damaged roots. Use a purpose made soft tree tie that can be easily loosened from time to time, alternatively use an old pair of tights tied in a figure of eight - cheap, but effective!

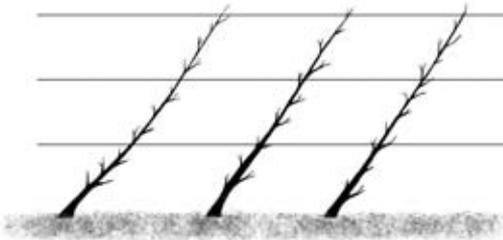
Try to position top of support stake to face into any prevailing wind



cordon

Where space is limited a single stem cordon system is an efficient use of available space, combining close planting with a compact style. You will need a framework of 1.8-2.1m (6-7') posts and horizontal supporting wires. Trees are planted against the wires at an angle of 30° along a 2.4m (8') bamboo cane that is attached to the wires. Trees should be planted with a distance of 45cm (18") between them. The rows should, if possible, run north to south to allow for maximum sunlight exposure.

The tree fruits on the small branches or spurs along the length of the main stem. Prune in winter, spacing the side branches to around every 23cm (9") in the summer cut back new growth to 2 to 3 buds on each branch. After 4 years or so you will need to remove some of the older spurs to allow new ones to develop.



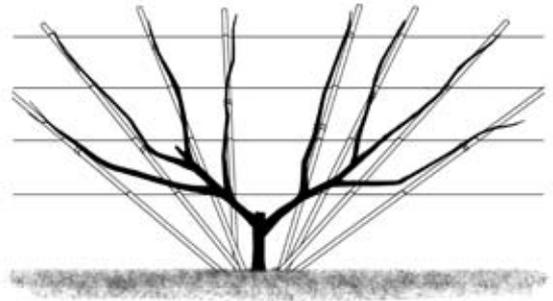
fan

Ideal for apricots, peaches and nectarines, this method utilises the shelter and warmth of a south or south-west facing wall, fence or free standing on a trellis in a sunny, sheltered place. A wall is favourite as it will absorb the warmth of the sun through the day, and will benefit the plant in times of shade or darkness.

Erect a 2.1m (7') long by 1.8m (6') high trellis against the wall with a lattice 30cm (1') square. A fan of ten 2.4m (8') canes should be attached to this which will act as support and guide for the young tree.

Plant the tree at the base of the fan. Shortly after the first leaves appear cut back the central stem to 45cm (18") above ground level. As the side branches develop they can be trained along the canes, attaching them with soft ties or string (do not use wire or anything that may damage the tree).

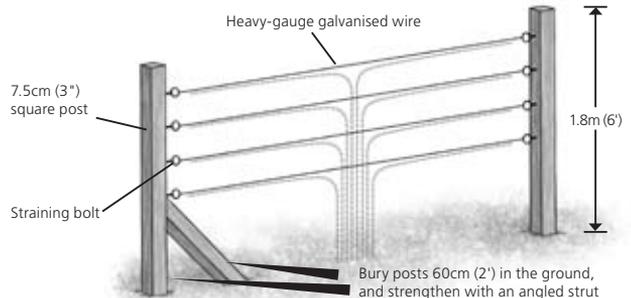
A 3 year old tree fan trained onto canes and wires, either against a wall, or free standing in a sunny, sheltered place.



post and wire

Soft fruits such as summer fruiting raspberries, blackberries, loganberries and tayberries, will require support too. They can be supported by training wires against a fence or wall, but by using a simple wire and post set up running in a north to south direction, the fruit will benefit from maximum sunlight penetration into the crop.

You will need stout posts, 2.4m (8') long, with 60cm (2') buried beneath ground level. Stretch 12-14 gauge wire between the posts horizontally at 60cm (2'), 1.2m (4') and 1.65m (5') above the ground. Support the end posts with struts at either end at 45° angles to withstand the tension of the wires.



soft fruit & tree fruit

rhubarb

It is probably more accurately described as a vegetable, but rhubarb is more generally thought of as a fruit.

It is possibly the easiest thing to grow, as it's very hard to go wrong. All you need to provide is a well fertilised area in full sun or partial shade, and off you go. It is usually not a good idea to take stalks for the first year, but once established it should be happy to provide them for up to a decade. Be warned though, it doesn't like disturbance, so make sure you put it in the right place to begin with.

It is very important to remember that it is only rhubarb stalks that are edible, the leaves contain oxalic acid which is poisonous to humans.

- Harvest by pulling the entire stalk away from the crown. Don't strip the plant of all of the leaves at any one time, always leave around four or five on the plant.
- Remove any flowers from the plant as soon as you see them, as once the plant sets seed it will never recover its vigour.

gooseberry

This lovely fruit is often overlooked and thought of as a bit 'old fashioned' these days (a bit like rhubarb), but it is such a tasty, versatile and easy to grow plant it is well worth having at least one bush in your garden. There are several varieties available which include fruit suitable for cooking, jams etc, and the larger and sweeter dessert types, and thornless cultivars.

It's worth being a bit choosy where you plant your bush, as with very little care it will be staying put and producing fruit for up to 20 years. A gooseberry appreciates a sunny location but will tolerate a little shade, and should be planted in the autumn (October is the optimum time), but can be planted as late as February. Soil should be well drained, and well dug over with organic matter incorporated before planting.

- The major pruning should be done in the winter, thinning out the centre mainly as this allows easier picking, and keeps air circulating which discourages mildew.
- A light summer pruning is not essential but keeping the centre of the bush clear ensures that the sun gets into the fruit and ripens the crop.
- In late May/early June start thinning out the developing berries, taking around half the crop. This fruit can be used for cooking, and ensures that you get a longer cropping season. The remaining fruit will have room to grow larger and can be gathered a few weeks later.
- In June/July it is wise to net the fruit, or erect a fruit cage to keep the birds off.

raspberry

With the exception of strawberries, probably nothing brings thoughts of summer days to mind quite like the taste, or scent of raspberries. Full of vitamins and minerals, this delicious fruit follows hot on the heels of the strawberry crop. With ever-bearers, and both summer and autumn fruiting varieties, you can have a four month long picking season.

Growing this fruit needs space, but is not too time consuming after planting. Select a sheltered, sunny position and incorporate plenty of well rotted manure or compost a month before planting. The best time for planting out raspberries is October, but autumn fruiting varieties can be planted through until March. Water well, this is a thirsty crop. When you plant them allow at least 35cm (14") between canes, and feed with a high potash fertiliser (a tomato feed will be ideal).

- Feed with a general fertiliser in March and mulch with a thick layer of well rotted manure or compost and remove any suckers.
- Summer fruiting plants will require support.
- Plant a modern thornless variety to avoid the need to wear armoured gloves when harvesting. There are also some beautiful yellow fruited cultivars on the market that have a unique flavour, and good yields.
- Don't want to wait for your first crop? Why not buy longer canes with year old fruiting wood that will give you fruit in the first year.

strawberries

Before the advent of year round imports from abroad, this was the most anticipated fruit of the year. The sight of strawberry stalls along the road sides and in the shops, or in the garden really meant that summer was here. Even now strawberries and cream are synonymous with Wimbledon and summer days. There are few plants more rewarding than the strawberry, ranging from big, juicy dessert types, smaller jam varieties, and the tiny, but intensely flavourful alpine strawberry. This little fruit is incredibly easy to grow, so simple that if you're not careful it will take over the garden.

Strawberries require a sunny position, sheltered from the wind, and well drained soil that has been improved with compost. Plant your strawberries as soon as you get them and water in. Planting through plastic will protect the fruit from slugs and earth splashes, alternatively mulch around the plant with chipped bark or straw when the fruit has set (if growing everbearers avoid straw as this can encourage fungal disease if used over an extended period of time). Keep weeds down and water regularly.

- By planting a selection of early, mid and late season varieties along with an everbearer you can be picking strawberries right through from mid-May into October.
- Do not plant where strawberries have recently cropped, as the chances of disease build up are increased.
- Strawberries do well in pots and hanging baskets, so its possible to grow them in the smallest spaces.

blackcurrants



The merits of growing this fruit are threefold, its easy to grow in most soils, provides an abundance of fruit, and is full of vitamins. During WWII most of the country's blackcurrant crop was turned into a nutritious cordial for children, a cordial that is still around and still popular.

Generally these tart little berries were turned into jam, or cooked alone or with other fruits, but these days there are much larger grape size cultivars that are very sweet. The bigger, dessert berries are delicious eaten fresh with cream like other summer fruits.

Although it requires a more acidic soil, the blackcurrant is pretty tolerant of most soils as long as plenty of compost or well rotted organic matter is dug in to enrich the soil. Growing in an open and sunny position, and keeping well watered is the key to a long picking season.

- Prepare soil around a month before planting adding plenty of organic matter.
- The ideal time for planting is early winter, mid-November is ideal, but can be planted through to mid-March.
- Pick when the berries are almost black. If you aren't using the fruit immediately cut off the whole truss of fruit as this will help keep the berries fresh for longer, they should last for up to five days in the fridge. Avoid picking in wet weather and don't wash the fruit when first picked as it will go mouldy very quickly when damp.
- Pruning - don't do it in the first year, but in the following and subsequent years prune in the winter.



blueberries

These delicious berries have become very popular in recent years due to their exceptionally high concentrations of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. They also belong to the elite group of so called 'super-foods'. Use the fruit mixed with others or the larger berries are great on their own, with cream or ice cream, or just as a snack.

Blueberries require a well drained acid soil which has had plenty of organic matter incorporated. If you have alkaline soil, or heavy clay it is better to grow in a container of ericaceous compost. The red stems

of the plant, autumn colour and pretty white flowers in spring, add to the bounty that this little plant has to offer.

- It is best to have two plants for cross fertilisation.
- Optimum soil acidity is between pH4.5 and 5.5, but will tolerate pH6 where plenty of organic matter has been dug in (NB: it is best to use well rotted pine chips or leaf mould to improve the soil as they provide nutrients and maintain acidity. Do not use manure.)
- Blueberries require very little pruning. However, in the winter remove any dead, weak, damaged or diseased wood, and for the first few years remove the tips of the branches.
- It is wise to net the plants once the fruit has set to avoid birds taking the fruit.
- Pick the fruit when they are beginning to soften and come away from the plant easily, generally 7-10 days after they turn blue.

apples



Our most popular fruit of all time. They are in fact easy to grow in your own garden, given space and the right choice of tree for the situation. Even fairly small gardens can accommodate a tree with the compact columnar, and dwarf trees that can live in large containers. They can also be grown as cordon or espaliers against a wall or fence to save space.

After choosing the size it is a case of deciding on whether you want eating apples or the more acidic cooking apple. Some varieties will fulfil both jobs, or have one of each if you have space. It may take a year or two to establish a tree, but it will be fruitful for a long, long time. Lastly if you only have room for one tree make sure you choose a self fertile variety if there are no other trees nearby.

- Choose an open sunny site and prepare your ground by digging in plenty of organic matter. Apples will tolerate a wide range of soils, but avoid poorly drained areas and low spots.
- Planting apple trees is best done during the winter months, November to February being the ideal time.
- When planting it is helpful to put in a pipe with holes drilled in it to help with watering the deeper roots. This will discourage shallow rooting.
- Ensure that the join where the tree has been grafted is above soil level when planted, and firm in well.
- Apples will need the fruitlets thinning to encourage good sized quality fruit. In early July, after the 'June drop' of tiny fruit, remove the central or 'king fruit' that is low quality and misshapen, reducing each cluster to one or two fruits. If this is not done the fruit yield will be higher, but the fruit will be very small and there may not be a crop at all the following year. As the weight is reduced so is the danger of broken branches from too much fruit.
- Apples are ready to harvest when they come away from the branch with just a light twist. Be careful not to bruise them during this time to prevent them rotting.

pears



While very similar to apples in many ways, pears have a number of differences.

Firstly they will live and produce fruit for a lot longer once established. They also prefer a warmer and sunnier site that is very well sheltered. Coming into blossom earlier than apples by at least a fortnight, the pear is far more susceptible to late frost damage too. And of course the soil requirements are different, they thrive in most soils including slightly heavier soil than apples will tolerate as these will not dry out quickly, and suffer from very few pests and diseases.

Pears aren't generally self fertile so two compatible trees are needed. They can be grown and trained in the same way as apples such as cordons, espaliers and bushes. Feed and prune in the same manner as apples.

- Watering is extremely important with pears, they will not tolerate drought and be sure to water well while the fruit is swelling.
- Planting time is best between November and February for bare root trees, even potted trees are best planted in the winter while dormant.
- Stake the tree when planting to avoid damaging roots later. With pears it is possible to remove the stake when the tree is strong enough.
- Thinning is advisable too, taking out smaller and blemished fruitlets and leaving about 10cm (4") between each one. It seems harsh, but the remaining fruit will develop into better quality pears.
- Very early pears are ripe for picking when the skin begins to change colour at the bottom of the fruit; these can be eaten straight away. Early pears are ripe when the colour changes around the stalk, store for a week before eating.
- As a rule pears do not store well and it varies between varieties. Some will only keep for a few weeks, others will last, with care and plenty of ventilation, until Christmas.



plums

This fruit is a perennial favourite, especially the Victoria plum, which is always a best seller. Plums are very easy to care for once established and the modern varieties available have provided an opportunity to grow them in smaller gardens. Those grafted onto St Julien, semi-dwarf root stock, provides a medium sized tree of around 2-2.5m (7-8'). Growing as a fan also saves space. Plums are not grown as cordons or espaliers.

The plum is the most popular of the stone fruits, and gages, damsons and bullaces are very close family members. When choosing your tree it is necessary to decide on size, dessert or cooking plum, and blossom time. Some are earlier to blossom than others and with fewer pollinating insects around, these varieties will need extra help with a soft artists brush. Late blossomers will find life a little easier. Also, as plums are less widespread than apple trees make sure you have a self-fertile variety, or two compatible cultivars. It is also a fact that the dessert plums are less hardy than the less fleshy cooking cultivars.

- Autumn through to early spring is planting time, with October/November being the best time of all.
- Train into a fan on a south facing wall to save space. This method makes it very easy to net to protect fruit from bird damage.
- Pruning should be done in early summer, and all cuts painted with a sealing compound to discourage silver leaf infection.
- Plums benefit from thinning the fruitlets in July, this is after the usual 'June Drop' has occurred. Remove any diseased or deformed specimens, plus the 'king fruit' in the centre which is low quality and misshapen - leave around 7.5cm (3") between fruits to allow them to develop well. Not only will this mean better, larger and juicier fruit, but the danger of broken branches from too much weight will be avoided. If there are still a large number of fruits left after thinning you can prop up the branches that are most at risk.

cherries



Another glorious summer fruit that is awaited with real anticipation, cherries are one of the sweetest and juiciest of all summer fruits and a real luxury. The season is short and the fruit is easily bruised in transit which also makes it an expensive pleasure. With modern advances made in rootstocks it is now relatively easy to grow your own cherries, and absolutely nothing beats the taste of a sun ripened cherry picked straight from the tree!

Your own cherry tree was once restricted to only the largest of gardens as they grew to

around forty feet high; pruning was impossible and bird protection non-existent. Now, with a suitable rootstock it is possible to grow a cherry in a relatively small space. A fan trained cherry can be grown against a large fence or wall, and other varieties will even grow in a large container. The modern cultivars are also very high yielding. Fan and dwarf trees are much more convenient for protecting against frost and bird damage.

- Cherries do best in deep free draining soil that has had extra organic matter dug in.
- Choose a self-fertile variety if space is limited, but if you can stretch to two trees, another pollinator nearby will enhance the yield. Leave at least 4.5m (15') between trees.
- Grow on a south facing wall for fan culture. This method of growing is a great space saver along with the added shelter and warmth of the wall, plus protecting the blossoms from frost, and the fruit and buds from birds is much easier.
- Cherries will not require any thinning of the set fruit.

peaches, apricots and nectarines



Picking a sun ripened peach off your own tree doesn't have to be a dream anymore. With hardier varieties available, and the use of dwarfing rootstocks, it is much easier to grow your own than you would think in the UK. There are also very dwarf plants that can be grown in pots, so if you have a very sunny little patio it may be an excellent place, and being self-fertile you will not need another tree nearby as a pollinator.

All you need is a south facing wall or fence, or a sunny, sheltered spot with well drained soil, for your tree. Peaches can be grown as a bush, but the fan is probably the easiest. Nectarines, the smooth skinned sister of the peach, can also be grown as a fan. They are not as heavy yielding as the peach, and are more tender, but still worth having. Finally, why not try an apricot? Modern varieties are much hardier, and better suited to the UK climate, plus they crop very well. The same method of culture can be used for all these stone fruits.



- Plant your trees in autumn while the soil is still warm, this will allow them to establish themselves before the spring.
- Dig the soil over well to avoid the young tree roots having to struggle, incorporating plenty of organic matter before planting. Peaches and nectarines are very fussy about soil, they don't like it too wet or likely to dry out too quickly.
- When planting against a wall make sure that the soil is well dug, with plenty of organic matter, remove any loose builders rubble or stone. Watering will be more critical in this location as the base of walls is often sheltered from rain.
- If possible protect the plants if frost is expected, or heavy rain to reduce damage to blossoms.
- Blossoming is very early in the year when there are fewer pollinating insects about. Give your plants a little help with a soft artists brush or cotton wool to move the pollen from flower to flower.
- Keep weeds down and water well, especially when the fruit swells.
- Thin fruitlets to around 20cm (8") between fruits. Modern apricots have the ability to carry all set fruit to maturity with little reduction in quality, however thinning to allow 7.5-10cm (3-4") will result in even larger fruits.
- Prune in early spring at early leaf stage to avoid any spread of disease such as leaf curl or silver leaf.
- If fruits are to be eaten straight away choose the tree ripened fruits, if they are to be stored for a week or so, pick before fully ripe (when the fruits are greenish yellow). Fruit will not ripen uniformly, so there will need to be around two to three pickings.

handy hints and money saving tips

When choosing which fruit you want to grow, check out what grows well locally as a guide.



Keep weeds down around fruit trees as they compete for the moisture and nutrients essential for producing fruit.

Most tree and soft fruits need protection from birds in June/July. Soft fruit can be grown in a purpose built fruit cage.

Where there's only room for one single tree in a garden, make sure you get a self fertile variety.



If you want something a little different why not try a yellow raspberry.

Prepare your soil a couple of weeks in advance of planting and on the day soak the rootball thoroughly beforehand.

Where space is at a premium it's possible to grow most fruit in containers and training into fans, espaliers and cordons takes up even less room.

With the modern dwarf varieties available these days, growing your own citrus fruit indoors is an affordable luxury.



When growing non self fertile varieties ensure you buy a compatible tree that blossoms at the same time.

If soil is shallow you may be best advised to grow in a raised bed. In heavy clay soil dig in organic matter and sharp sand or grit to aid drainage.