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## IF-10 Growing Fruit Trees in Northern Nevada

Apples are the most reliable fruit producing tree, followed by pears, plums cherries, apricots and then peaches and nectarines. Proper planting and care can yield a generous reward of great tasting fruit year after year. With some shelter for the cold zones, a warm late winter and spring sun, peaches can easily produce every other year. With the proper selection of varieties, a home fruit orchard can produce a bountiful crop every year.

The keys to successfully growing fruit in northern Nevada are proper selection of fruit variety, site selection and care. While our typical growing season extends from May 15th thru September 15th (120 days in a good year), many growing seasons end up being only 90 to 100 days due to late or early frost. Trees may grow very well, but rarely produce fruit because a poor variety (one with low chilling hour requirement) was planted or the tree was planted in the wrong location and frost kills the flowers.

### Types of Fruit Trees

**Apple** – Semi-dwarfs (18 feet tall), dwarfs and ultra dwarf varieties are available. Ultra dwarf varieties grow up to 8 feet in height, so fruit is always easy to reach. They do require support from trellising or staking, Thinning of fruit should take place a month after blooming has stopped with spacing of apples 6-8 inches apart. Codling moths will cause worms in the fruit. Apples are susceptible to fire blight and powdery mildew.

**Pear** – Semi-dwarf and dwarf varieties are available. Pears have a similar growing and chilling requirement as apples but are much less tolerant of over-watering and wet, poorly drained soils. The fruit can be picked while still green and ripened while stored. Fruit rarely needs thinning, but two fruit per cluster is ideal. Codling moths will cause worms in the fruit. Pears are susceptible to fire blight disease and root rot.

**Asian Pear** - Asian pears resemble the shape of an apple and need to ripen on the tree. Chilling requirements are low, generally between 300 and 500 hours, so site selection is important for producing fruit. Asian pears require acidic soil, between 5.9 to 6.5 pH. Few varieties are self-pollinating; for those which are not, selection of a pollinator is very important.

**Plum & Prune** – Semi-dwarf to ultra-dwarf varieties are available. Many are self-fruitful, but a few varieties need a pollinator. Chilling requirements for plums range between 200 to 800 hours, so do your research. European plums do not require thinning but Japanese plums need thinning for 4 to 6 inch spacing of fruit. Aphids, borers, and powdery mildew are common pest.

**Sweet & Sour Cherries** – Semi-dwarf to ultra-dwarf varieties are available. Most require a pollinator, even though they may be self-fertile. Cherries grown in our area should have chill hour requirements of 700 hours or above. Aphids are a major problem when they attack new growth in spring.

**Apricot, Peach & Nectarine** – Small trees up to 16 feet, with dwarf to ultra-dwarf varieties available. This group blooms early, so frost protection is needed, preferably with site selection. Plant in well drained soil; they do not tolerate over-watering or soggy soil. Peaches are self-fruitful and do not need a pollinator. Some apricot varieties are self-fruitful while others require a specific pollinator. Thin fruit after it has reached 1 inch diameter to a 6 inch spacing along branches. Aphids, codling moths and peach tree borers are the common insect pests. Peach leaf curl, bacterial spot, and powdery mildew are the most common diseases of this group.

### Cultural Requirements

**Planting** – Plant fruit trees is the same as planting any other tree or shrub. A soil test is recommended to determine which amendments are required.

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**Watering** – Fruit benefits from deep watering with time between watering to allow the soil to dry out. Typically this means once or twice a week for a tree that's been planted three years or more. More frequent water exposes the trees to stress which can lead to canker, rot, insect infestations, and eventually death.

**Fertilizing** – Fertilize trees with an all-purpose fertilizer or one specifically formulated for fruit trees. These are typically higher in nitrogen, with moderate phosphate, and low potassium. Choosing an organic based fertilizer is recommended since these fertilizers will last longer in the soil and encourage a healthy living soil.

**Pruning** – Yearly pruning of young fruit trees is critical for the first four years to develop proper branch structure. Once this is achieved, prune every two to three years to maintain this structure. Dead or diseased branches may be removed at any time. Major pruning should be done during the late winter or early spring before the tree starts bud break. Mid-summer pruning is appropriate for correcting structure. Apple, pear, Asian pear and cherries should have a central leader with strong branching. Plum, prune, peach, nectarine and apricot should have a vase of open center form

**Fruit Thinning** - Fruit thinning is necessary to reduce limb breakage as well as to increase the quality and size of the fruit. Though trees will naturally drop their fruit during the summer, we can help them by removing fruit before the limbs become so overly burdened with fruit that they break.

**Pests** - Common pest affecting home orchards include aphids, spider mites, white fly, leaf hopper, scale, codling moths, borers, powdery mildew, peach leaf curl, cankers, fire blight, and root rot. Proper cultural practices and regular inspection can minimize the significance of these pests. Applying dormant oil mixed with lime-sulfur during the late winter will control over-wintering insects and diseases. Good sanitation practices such as the removing fallen leaves and fruit will also minimize recurrence of these plant pests.

#### **Frost Protection:**

**Plant Selection** - Choose a variety which has a high chill hour requirement -- ideal for our area is 700+ hours. Choosing any variety of fruit with a chill hour requirement below that will require careful site selection.

**Site Selection** - Fully exposed to the climate, apples will produce almost every year while peaches will produce about once every 5 to 7 years. An eastern, northeastern, or even northern exposure is great for extending dormancy into spring. This delays the bud break into spring by up to one month. The flowers will bloom later in the season and are consequently less susceptible to spring frost damage. The shelter has to be tall and dense enough top protect the trees. A structure such as a house or a grove of evergreen trees is usually sufficient if located within thirty feet to the south of the trees.

**Covering** - If the tree is small enough, such as an ultra dwarf, you may cover the top of the tree with a cloth tarp or bed sheet which traps heat that the ground releases all night. Cover between 4:00 PM and sunset. Remove the covering the next morning when temperature is above freezing. If plastic is used, remove it before the sun heats the inside temperature to above 35 degrees F.

**Watering** - If tree is too large to cover, you can insulate it by spraying continuously with water from a hose sprinkler after the temperature reaches 33 degrees F. Ice will form over the limbs, preventing them from reaching temperatures below 33 degrees F. This method does waste water and needs to be done only as the temperature reaches that point, which is often at 5:00 to 6:30 AM. If trees are located in the lawn, your irrigation system may be used.

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