

Some fruits are easy to grow in North Florida

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Photo credit to ABC Ranch: Blackberries are one of the easiest to grow fruits in north Florida .

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We spend a great deal of time talking with folks about growing fruit, and one of the first questions we hear is, “How hard is it to grow fruit in North Florida?” As always in gardening, the answer is “it depends”. Fruits and nuts vary greatly in their ease of cultivation.

First, only fruit adapted to USDA Zone 8B will grow well here. That means we can’t grow McIntosh apples (but we can grow Anna, Dorsett Golden and Tropic Sweet apples). Second, some fruits and nuts are easier to grow than others. To help folks think about how difficult different types of fruit are to grow, we invented our arbitrary “Ease of Cultivation” scale, ranging from 1-10. Take note there is no fruit scaled a zero. Even the easiest to grow and longest-lived fruits (Rank 1) need food, water and some maintenance pruning. The hardest to grow fruit (Ranks 6-10) will probably be difficult to grow without additional care and may tend to be relatively short-lived.

Want a basket of blueberries (Rank 1)? All you need is acidic soil, fertilizer and water. Your grandchildren will be eating from the same bushes. Want a basket of perfect nectarines (Rank 10)? You’ve pruned, fertilized and sprayed (more than once). You’ll be eating from that tree for 8-12 years, with care and luck.

So what are the easiest fruits and nuts (Ranks 1-5)? Blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, chestnuts, citrus (some cold-hardy varieties), crabapples, figs, jujubes, kiwis, mulberries, muscadine grapes, loquats, pears, pecans, persimmons, pineapple guava, pomegranates and strawberries are all relatively easy to grow. Think of pawpaw, mayhaw, mandarin melonberry and quince. Even papayas, grown here as an annual plant, will give a

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bushel of fruit or more by frost if fertilized and watered properly. Each fruit will have its own pluses and minuses for your particular garden and you should pick based on accurate information.

So what are the tough fruits? Unfortunately everyone's favorites, peaches, plums and nectarines (Rank 7-10), require lots of care and attention to key sprays to insure consistent crops and good tree health. We would also put container (tender) citrus at Rank 7. You can grow a great key lime or Italian Blood orange in Tallahassee, but you have to keep the trees above 32 degrees at all times. Bunch grapes (Rank 7) are also more difficult than their muscadine brethren (Rank 3). Why are muscadine grapes a Rank 3? You must build a sturdy trellis and prune each year. Bunch grapes require that, and regular spraying as well.

What you grow should be determined by what you like to eat, available space and how much time you have to spend. Everyone's got room for a pomegranate (Rank 1), with its shiny foliage and beautiful flowers and fruit. Love blueberries (Rank 1)? You can grow 6 varieties in a 25 foot hedgerow. That's two months of berries! Can't live without a perfect peach (Rank 9)? Be ready for some additional care, but get out your Grandmother's pie recipe when the tree's been in a few years.

Is Tallahassee a tough place to grow fruit? Sometimes, but where else can you grow apples and oranges in the same yard?

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