

Why Don't My Fruit Trees Live Longer?

Growing fruit in the Deep South can be a wonderful, rewarding hobby that can offer many tasty returns. We are blessed with a great climate that offers a huge range of fruits that can be successfully grown here; after all there are very few places in the world you can grow citrus and apples in the same yard. But with this great climate of short mild winters also comes a wider range of bugs and fungus. It's these issues that can weaken a fruit tree and make it have a shorter life span than we would see in more northern climates. Getting your trees to live as long as possible relies on some careful planning and work to keep them healthy.

Begin by buying healthy trees grafted on the correct rootstock for our area. Our climate is unique and you'll need to find the trees that have been bred to be successful in our area. To understand this more deeply read our "Choosing Fruit Trees Fact Guide"

<http://www.justfruitsandexotics.com/JF%20ChoosingFruitTrees.pdf> .

Having your tree grafted on the correct root stock is one of the key factors to the longevity of your trees, and it's probably one on the most overlooked and rarely talked about points when buying fruit trees in the Deep South. In the case of peach, plum and nectarines it can mean the difference of a tree living three to four years verses ten to fifteen years. For instance, dwarfing root stocks are often a very bad idea in the Deep South. Most dwarfing root stocks have been bred for climates different than ours and are weak growers, thus being very short lived in the Deep South. There are exceptions; Flying Dragon trifoliolate is a good dwarfing root stock for citrus. Here's a chart to help guide you.



UF Beauty peaches

IMPORTANT ROOT STOCK FOR THE SOUTH		
FRUIT TYPE	CORRECT ROOT STOCK	REASON
Apple	MM111	Wooly Aphid resistant and semi dwarf
Citrus	Trifoliolate. For dwarfing use "Flying Dragon Trifoliolate"	Keeps tree dormant in winter prevents freeze damage
Peach, Plum, Nectarine	Nemaguard or Guardian Peach	Nematode resistant
Pears	Pyrus Calleryana	Fire Blight resistant
Persimmon	Native American Persimmon	Establishes on a wide range of soils and is heat tolerant

The longevity of a tree also begins with giving it a good start. Plant them in the right place. Fruit trees need a lot of sun to stay healthy, choose a place that receives at least a half a day of strong afternoon sun. Have your soil tested for pH before you plant and periodically throughout the tree's life. See our "Planting Guide"

<http://www.justfruitsandexotics.com/JF%20PlantingThemRight-LongVersion.pdf> to determine the correct pH for each type of fruit tree. Adjusting the soil pH to the correct range will allow the plant to absorb the fertilizer you are putting on the tree, which will keep them healthy. When you buy fertilizer choose one that releases slowly, so it feeds the tree over a long time, and be sure it includes trace elements. Just like us humans, plants need their vitamins to stay healthy.

Producing fruit is a huge drain on a tree. While young, years one and two, a tree is forming structure and building strength. Fruit loads on the tree during this time period can weaken the tree, pull it out of shape, and lead to an early demise. It is best to remove all the newly forming fruit the first year after planting. Thin heavily or remove all fruit again on the second year if the tree has not grown well. Throughout the tree's life thin your crops to balance the tree's health and achieve a good size fruit.

Avoid water stress. Watering during droughts, and when the trees are under a fruit load, will insure the tree remains healthy and strong. Think about installing a micro sprinkler system with a timer on it so you can take a vacation from the watering detail. These systems are cheap and easy for the home owner to install, they insure the root system is evenly watered and a timer will save you money in the long run. Read our "Micro Sprinkler Guide" <http://www.justfruitsandexotics.com/JF%20MicroIrrigation.pdf>

Keeping your trees disease free goes a long way to making them live longer. Monitor your trees closely for disease and bugs, and if you find a problem email us a photo or bring in a sample of the problem. We are here to help guide you through the learning curve of what to do and when to do it. You can also read our "Monthly Orchard Guide" <http://www.justfruitsandexotics.com/JF%20OrchardSched.pdf> to get an idea on what the timing is for key sprays.