

Growing Pears & Plums in Montana



Pear and plum trees are a welcome addition to any home landscape. Many varieties will not withstand Montana's harsh climates, but several hardy varieties have been proven to do just fine in the Great Falls area with proper placement in the landscape, care and maintenance. These fruit trees not only provide delicious fruit, but also are an attractive landscape tree with their nice form and display of beautiful flowers in the spring.

Soil

Pear and plum trees perform best in a deep, fertile, well-drained, sandy loam soil. However, depending on the rootstock that they are grafted onto, plums and pears can tolerate heavier soils as long as the drainage is adequate. Fruit trees will not tolerate "wet feet", which makes them susceptible to root diseases. If your soil is heavy clay, it may be necessary to build up a small berm to plant the trees in.

Planting

Fruit trees need to be planted in a full sun location for optimum fruiting. Bare root trees should be planted in the spring. This is when bare root trees are most commonly available in nurseries. Containerized trees can be planted any time during the growing season. Most fruit trees are propagated by grafting or budding a desired variety onto a rootstock. This rootstock determines the size of the tree and its hardiness. The area at the base of the tree, called the graft union, must be about 6" above the ground after planting. If this graft union is buried, the tree will eventually deteriorate and die.

Fertilizing

It is not advisable to add fertilizer when planting. Young roots are easily burned and the tree may die back. However, after the first year use a complete fertilizer. Fertilizer stakes are easy to use and provide a slow release fertilizer throughout the growing season. Avoid using excess amounts of nitrogen fertilizer, which will promote lush green foliar growth, but will decrease the production of fruit or cause the fruit to split.

Pollination

The plum trees that we carry are all self-pollinating varieties. However, fruit trees tend to bear more and higher quality fruit when there is another variety planted within 100 feet.

Pears are generally not self-fertile. Two varieties, planted within 100 feet of each other, should be used to serve as a source of pollen for each other. Cross-pollination is possible only when varieties bloom at approximately the same time. The length of bloom is usually 7 to 10 days. Early bloomers should be planted with early or midseason bloomers and late bloomers with late or midseason bloomers.

Pruning

Pruning is the heart of good fruit tree management. Three kinds of pruning are training, maintenance and corrective.

Training is the process of giving desirable structure to fruit trees from 1 to 4 years after planting. This is done primarily to get the framework of branches located for convenience of harvesting and spraying. When a whip is planted, it should be headed at approximately 30 inches. All side limbs should be headed back to five buds or removed completely. On larger trees, 5 to 8 feet tall, all limbs lower than 2.5 to 3 feet should be removed entirely. No two limbs should arise at the same level on the trunk. Select limbs with a wide branching angle to the trunk or use spreaders to prevent narrow branch angles. Form additional scaffolds of 2 to 4 limbs at 18" to 24" intervals above the first.

Maintenance pruning is used to renew fruiting wood, increase fruit size, improve fruit quality by letting more light into the tree, increase the fruit set and remove dead or damaged wood.

Corrective pruning, which is often severe, is sometimes needed to reduce tree size and to correct or remove poor limbs. It is also used to rejuvenate trees that have been injured. Pruning can be done any time after the leaves fall in autumn and before bud break in the spring. Fruit trees can also be pruned during the summer to remove water sprouts, suckers and broken or damaged stems.

Insects and Diseases

Success in growing fruit trees depends on effective control of insects and diseases. Using dormant sprays in early spring, while the tree is still dormant, is an effective way to control insects and disease. Be sure to read and follow all directions. Some dormant sprays are for insects, some for fungus and some are all purpose sprays that combine fungicides with insecticides. Remember that it is always much easier to control insects and diseases than to treat them after they have damaged the tree.

Varieties We Carry

Parker Pear—Zone 4

- Blooms early to mid May and ripens mid August.
- Upright and vigorous grower.
- Fruit is large yellow-bronze, fine grained, tender and juicy.
- Good for fresh eating, canning, jam.
- Pair with Summercrisp Pear.

Patten Pear—Zone 4

- Blooms mid May and should be harvested in mid September when crisp and green.
- Fruit is good sized and yellow.
- Sweet flavor, good for fresh eating. Tender and juicy.
- Pair with Summercrisp or Parker Pear.

Summercrisp Pear— Zone 4

- Blooms mid May and should be harvested in mid August when crisp and still green with a red blush.
- Beautiful red fall color.
- Fruit is 2 1/2-3" in diameter and 3-3 1/2" long, sweet and crisp.
- Can be stored up to 2 months.
- Good for fresh eating.
- Free from fire blight.
- Pair with Parker or Patten Pear.

Mount Royal Plum— Zone 4

- Blooms in early May and ripens in late August.
- Fruit is medium sized, blue, tender and juicy.
- Good for fresh eating, desserts and preserves.
- Self-fruited, does not need a pollinator.

Recipes

Recipes courtesy of www.epicurious.com

Pears with Pear Sauce

Can be prepared in 45 minutes or less.

3 firm-ripe small pears
3 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1/8 teaspoon vanilla
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
a 2 1/2- by 1-inch strip of lemon zest

Peel, core, and chop coarse 1 of the pears. In a small dry non-stick skillet sauté the pear over moderately high heat, stirring occasionally, for 5 to 6 minutes, or until it is tender and golden, and transfer it to a small food processor. In the skillet, cleaned and dried, melt the sugar over moderately low heat, stirring with a fork, and cook the syrup, swirling the skillet gently, until it is a light caramel. Remove the skillet from the heat, pour the heavy cream carefully down the side of the skillet, and whisk the mixture until the caramel is dissolved and the mixture is smooth. Add the caramel to the food processor, blending it with the cooked pear until it is smooth. Stir in the vanilla and keep the sauce warm.

Peel, halve, and core the remaining 2 pears. In the skillet, cleaned, melt the butter over moderately low heat, add the zest and the pears, and cook the pears for 4 to 5 minutes on each side, or until they are tender. Divide the pears between 2 plates and spoon the pear sauce over them. Serves 2.

Plum Barbeque Sauce

Active time: 10 min Start to finish: 1 hr

1 small onion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 lb black plums (4), pitted and coarsely chopped
1 1/4 cups water
1/4 cup plum jam
2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt

Cook onion in oil in a 3- to 4-quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 5 minutes. Stir in remaining ingredients and simmer, uncovered, stirring more frequently toward end of cooking, until plums fall apart and sauce is thickened, about 1 hour. Cool to room temperature. Serve with pork or chicken. Makes about 1 1/2 cups.

Plums with Orange and Mint

1 pound plums (about 4)
1/4 cup fresh orange juice
1 tablespoon finely shredded fresh mint leaves
1/2 tablespoon sugar

Halve and pit plums. Cut plums into thin wedges and in a bowl toss with remaining ingredients. Chill plum mixture, covered, stirring occasionally, at least 2 hours and up to 8. Serves 4



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